

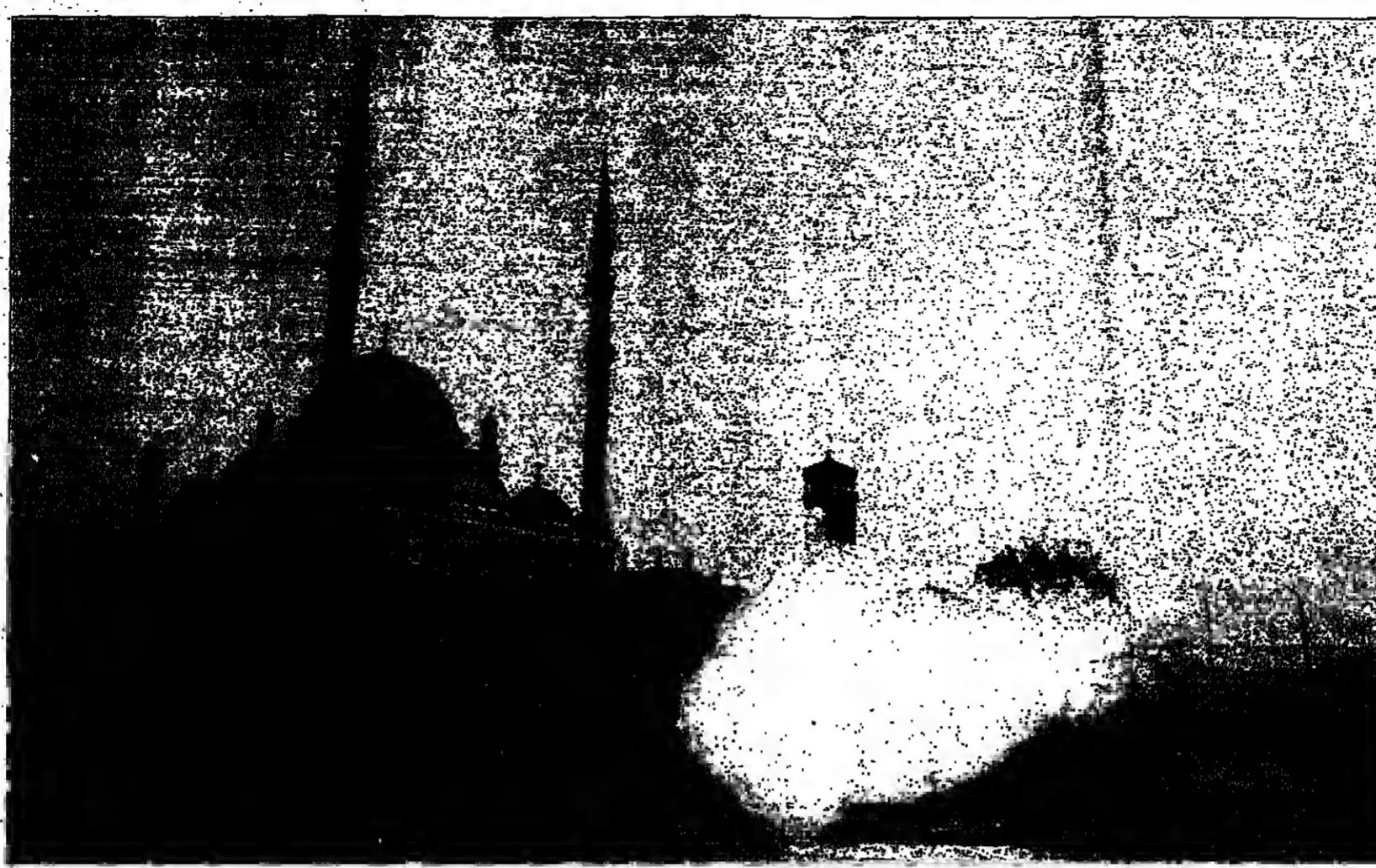
Al-Ahram

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**Border talks**

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak and Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi are meeting today at the Egyptian military base of Sidi Barrani near the Egyptian-Libyan border, Egyptian officials said yesterday.

The meeting has no specific agenda, but is expected to deal with regional issues, the peace process and the UN air embargo imposed on Libya since 1992 for failing to hand over two suspects in the bombing of an American airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland. Gaddafi, who travels by land because of the air ban, last met with President Mubarak in June 1994.

More hostages

RUSSIAN forces yesterday unleashed their third day of massive artillery and rocket fire on Chechen rebels who are holding over 100 hostages in the Dagestani village of Pervomaiskaya. Meanwhile, the Chechen guerrilla war flared outside Russia's border when pro-Chechen gunmen commanded a Russian Black Sea ferry carrying nearly 200 people.

The hijack leader — identified as Turkish national Mohammed Tokcan — told a private Turkish TV station that he had placed explosives under trucks and fuel tanks aboard the ship "Avrasya". As the ship navigated through the Bosphorus Strait to Istanbul trailed by Turkish patrol boats, the hijackers threatened to kill all Russian passengers after releasing the Turkish ones and to blow up the ship unless Russian troops stopped fighting Chechen rebels. Turkish officials requested the hijackers to negotiate and, Russia cancelled all cruise ships from its territory to Turkey. (see p. 7)

UN summons

THE UN Security Council is expected to act on Sudan's refusal to hand over the militants responsible for the attempted assassination of President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa last June, reports Atef El-Ghamri from New York.

The Egyptian representative at the UN, Ambassador Nabil El-Arabi asserted that Sudan's refusal does not only touch on its bilateral relations with Ethiopia, but on peace and security of the entire region.

As a preliminary step, the Security Council, which is expected to investigate the issue further in the next few days, decided to summon the Sudanese ambassador to the UN to remind him of his country's obligations under an Organisation of African Unity resolution to hand over the accused militants.

Silver jubilee

RUSSIA will be sending a special delegation to Egypt to join in celebrations of the Aswan High Dam's 25th anniversary. Vladimir Goumen, the Russian ambassador to Cairo, told Imaas News that the delegation, which will be headed by the Russian minister of energy, would include people who had helped construct the dam in the 1960s.

Goumen said the High Dam epitomised the strong ties between Russia and Egypt, asserting that the dam was capable of operating for another 75 years and that Russia was willing to help with renovation work.

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SUNSET'S STRONGHOLD: Ramadan will begin on Sunday, according to observatory sightings. Throughout the month, the firing of the Citadel's cannon, marking the end of the daily fast, is eagerly awaited. The late Mohamed Youssef, distinguished photographer and former head of *Al-Ahram's* Photography Department, pioneered the tradition of photographing the cannon as it was being fired. Unfortunately, in such images the Citadel is lost in a sunset haze. Sheriff Soobal overcomes the problem of the missing mosque by using double exposure, to show the cannon's splendid architectural setting.

PALESTINIANS in East Jerusalem will be going to post offices, and not polling stations, on Saturday to cast their votes. The distinction, dictated by Israel, has political implications, reports Julie Till from the holy city.

Five post offices have been designated for election use by the Palestinians, but Israel wants to keep them open to provide a normal postal service at the same time. The irony, said Faisal Husseini, the Palestinian National Authority's minister for Jerusalem affairs, is that most post offices usually close on the Jewish Sabbath.

But on Saturday the right to vote will be matched by the right to buy a postage stamp. "It is hardly an example of Israeli good will towards these elections", commented Ian Blackley, a spokesman for the European Union (EU) election observers.

Rather, it is an offshoot of Israeli internal politics. The Israeli right, angry at the government for "conceding" voting rights to Palestinians in what it views as Israel's eternal and undivided capital, had to be appeased. "This is a recipe for disaster", said Husseini. "It will be an invitation to those [extremist] Israeli organisations to come into these voting stations." Husseini fears the result could be violence.

Independent candidate Hanan Ashrawi agreed. "The possibility of violence has been aggravated by this decision", she said.

There are 56,000 registered voters in East Jerusalem. Even without the scramble for stamps, the post offices would not be able to accommodate all those wishing to vote. Only around 4,400 will vote where they live. The rest will have to travel to polling stations outside the Jerusalem electoral district. Two days before election day, many Jerusalem voters still do not know where they will cast their ballots.

This is no accident. A low turnout will be politically useful to Israel in negotiations over the city's future with the Palestinians, due to open in May.

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Journalists sceptical over MP's zeal

The draft press law put before parliament by journalist MP Ayman Nour proved to be a copy of the Press Syndicate's draft. Yet, as Shaden Shehab finds out, journalists fear his unilateral action may harm their hard-won unity



Ibrahim Nafie

Gamal Badawi

Ayman Nour

Ayman Nour, a journalist and Wafdist member of parliament, surprised fellow journalists earlier this month when it was reported that he had submitted a draft press law to the house. The draft was intended as a potential replacement for Law 93 for 1995, the controversial legislation which the Press Syndicate had pledged to have repealed. Nour immediately made it clear that his draft was a photocopy of the draft approved by the Syndicate's General Assembly on 24 December. But journalists' misgivings could not be allayed. There were fears that Nour's unilateral action could shatter the unity of journalists, whose protest against Law 93 had been almost unanimous, or that it could result in a new law that falls short of their expectations.

Law 93, passed last May, angered journalists because it prescribed harsh penalties for the publication of false or malicious news or for deriding public officials and institutions.

The Press Syndicate's draft has also been passed on to the government-appointed committee entrusted with preparation of a new press law to replace Law 93. This committee includes both journalists and legal ex-

perts; the syndicate's draft is intended to guide it in its formulation of a new law. The syndicate's General Assembly is scheduled to meet on 10 March. The date of the assembly could be advanced if the committee completes its task earlier, or if it becomes clear that it is deliberately procrastinating or that its deliberations run counter to the journalists' demands.

Nour told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he believed he was taking a "short cut" when he sent the draft to the People's Assembly. Declaring that he had the support of two members of the syndicate's council, Yehia Qalash and Mohamed Abdel-Qoddous, Nour asked: "What is the point of waiting for the committee to complete the preparation of the new law? Why can't we try to get the draft approved in two ways, one via the committee and the other via my presence in the People's Assembly?"

Nour said he had submitted a report to the syndicate's chairman Ibrahim Nafie, explaining that he had not intended to go over the head of the syndicate's council.

While Nafie did not express outright disapproval of Nour's action, he nevertheless had some doubts. "It's not in my nature to deny anybody's right to ex-

press his opinion or propose ideas", he told the *Weekly*. "If I did, I wouldn't be the syndicate's chairman. Neither would I be a champion of the freedom of expression and the press."

"However," he added, "I have one reservation. For the past seven months, the syndicate has been able to project a united stand and win public opinion over to our position, which is to safeguard both the freedom of the press and the rights of society."

Nafie explained that journalists, from both the national and opposition press, have a strong presence on the government committee preparing the new law.

"We have seven syndicate members, led by the chairman", he said. "The committee is divided into four subcommittees, three headed by ex-chairmen of the syndicate and the fourth by me."

Asked why Nour's action should not be viewed as a positive step, Nafie replied: "I fear that sending the draft directly to the People's Assembly means that many hands will be able to play with it. Some people like to amend each item and idea." Any draft, he added, "requires careful study and discussion and, finally, a compromise is reached. Not a compromise on the main issue, which is

having Law 93 revoked. But we journalists have demands which may not be acceptable to the whole of society. Therefore, we should reach a formula that will be acceptable to all sides. Our task is to win public support because the draft must be submitted to the People's Assembly by the government, and not the syndicate."

On the question of reports that 14 MPs, led by Tagammu Party leader Khalid Mohieddin, had submitted another draft to the People's Assembly, Nafie commented: "It seems that this is becoming a competition. But in the end we will adopt the draft which is more acceptable to the majority of journalists."

Gamal Badawi, chief editor of *Al-Wafd* newspaper, where Nour once worked, takes great exception to Nour's action. In his view, it has shattered the journalists' solidarity and negated all their efforts over the past seven months. "He has made all the extraordinary general assemblies and efforts of the syndicate's council seem pointless," Badawi said. "He did what he did because he wanted to play the hero, as if he were the only one who wanted the syndicate's draft to be approved."

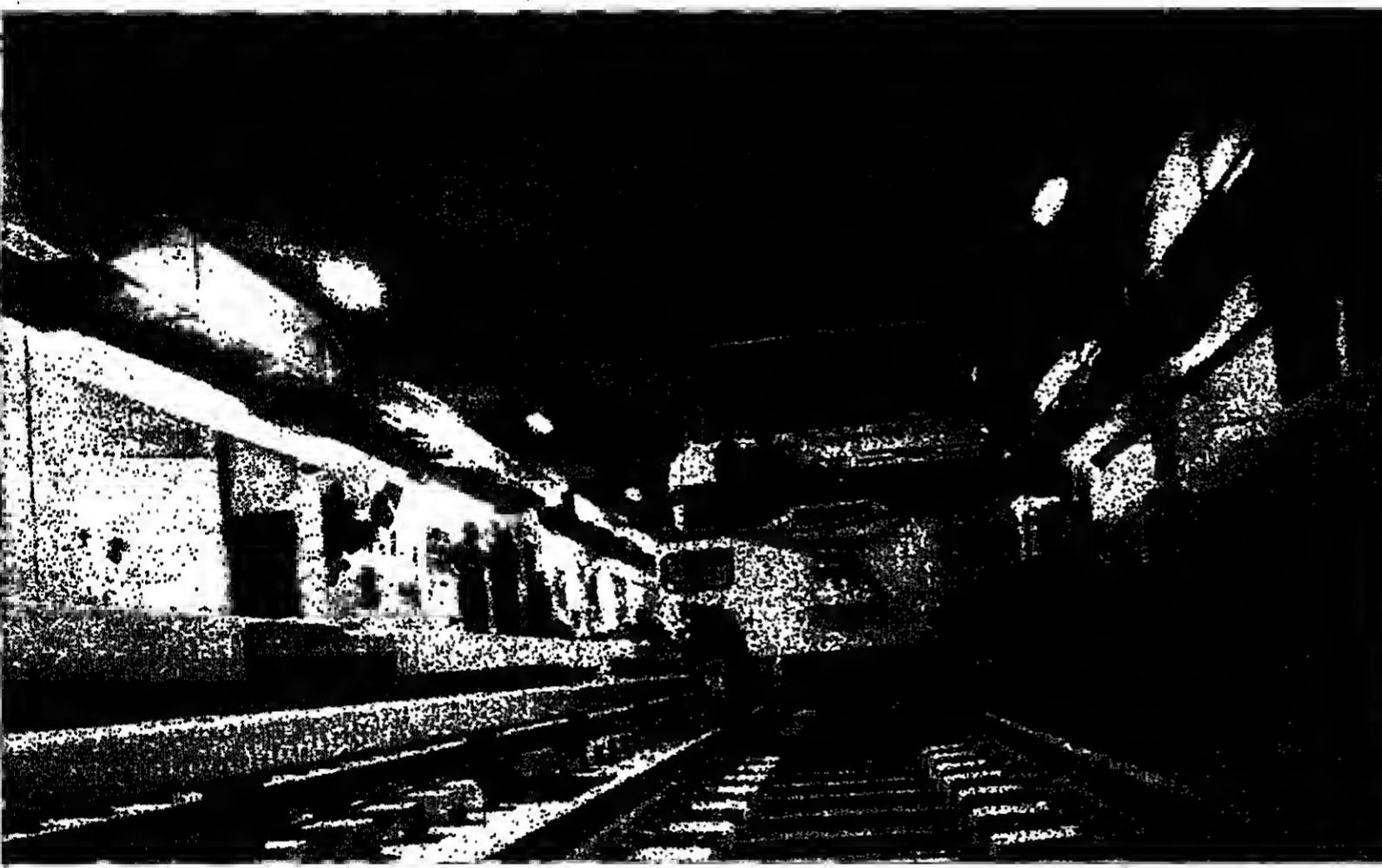


photo: Sherif Sonbol

Giant diggers finish line

Construction work on the first phase of Cairo's second underground metro line has been completed. The section will be opened to the public in October. Nermene El-Nawawi visits the site

Construction work on the first phase of Cairo's second metro line, using two giant digging machines, each weighing some 800 tonnes, is now complete, according to Youssri Khatib, vice-chairman of the National Authority for Tunnels. The completed section connects Shubra Al-Kheima in the north with Ramses Square, a distance of about eight kilometres. Additional work, mainly the installation of mechanical, signal and control equipment, is continuing and will be finished by June. This will be followed by an experimental period and the line will finally open to the public in October, Khatib said.

The new section will make a major contribution to Cairo's public transport facilities. The first line, connecting Helwan in the south with Marg in the north, is

currently used by 1.1 million passengers daily. According to Khatib, the number of passengers on the metro may rise to two million per day with the opening of the second line.

Work on the second phase of the second line, connecting Ramses Square with Tahrir Square, a distance of 2.9 kilometres, has already begun, and should be completed by June 1997, Khatib said. The second line will intersect with the first at Ramses and Tahrir Squares.

However, a starting date for the third phase of the project has yet to be set, Khatib continued. This phase involves extending the metro under the Nile bed and on to Cairo University in the Giza governorate, a distance of five kilometres, and from there to the Giza

railway station, an additional three kilometres. Work on the project, which is costing LE5 billion, is being undertaken by a consortium of French companies and local contractors.

In Khatib's view, the biggest problem facing the engineers in the first phase was ensuring that work did not damage the old buildings in Cairo's Shubra district and Qalyubiya governorate. "We had to keep a close watch on those buildings and we used video cameras all the time that work was in progress", he said. "In some cases, residents were asked to evacuate very old houses for a limited period after receiving adequate compensation."

The new section is served by seven stations, five of them underground.

A prominent Muslim Brotherhood figure is seeking to set up a new political party which, he claims, will not be a front for the outlawed organisation. Omayma Abdel-Latif reports

ever, the platform is not dominated by a fundamentalist Islamic perspective, and states: "We will opt for *ijtihad* (interpretation of religious texts) that does not impose restrictions on the progress of society." The group, Madi said, had adopted new approaches to dealing with Egypt's problems such as unemployment and slum housing.

The eight-chapter platform states that "the people are the source of all authority". This authority, to all its aspects, is delegated to the people's representatives through free elections.

Although Madi conceded that some features of the new party's platform had similarities with Ibrahim Shukri's Islamist-oriented Labour Party, he insisted that Al-Wasat would be different. "We use moderate language, adopt moderate policies and steer clear from fanaticism", he said.

The group's platform highlights the importance of implementing the second article of the constitution, which stipulates that Islamic *shari'a* is the principal source of legislation. How-

ever, the platform as the one and only reference point: "We, Copts and Muslims alike, belong to the Islamic civilisation." Habit explained, "the Muslims for religious reasons and the Copts for cultural reasons".

Madi's action coincided with reports that Mustafa Mashrouh has taken over the Brotherhood's leadership from its ailing Supreme Guide Hazem Abu-Nasr. Brotherhood spokesman Mamoun El-Hodeibi declined to confirm or deny the reports, declaring that only Mashrouh was authorised to speak on the subject.

However, he did comment that the Brotherhood had not been consulted in advance about Madi's move. "We were never approached by the founders of this party and have no information about their doings, but we hope it will be for the good of the country", he said. Madi confirmed that he had not consulted the Brotherhood's leadership before requesting a licence to establish a new party.

Islamic civilisation is perceived by

Top star in real life drama

A police officer has been charged with attempted murder for forcing his way, armed with an automatic pistol, into the home of a top cinema star

Prosecution authorities have remanded police Lt. Ahmed Mohamed Abul-Rouss in custody for four days after charging him with attempted murder for threatening to shoot Yosra, one of Egypt's top cinema actresses, and her maid, with his automatic pistol. The officer, who reportedly forced his way into Yosra's apartment in the exclusive Zamalek district by posing as a postman, was also charged with unlawful entry and restricting the freedom of other persons.

According to conflicting reports in the Arabic-language press, the officer denied all charges, claiming that he was having an affair with the actress and had arrived at her home with her consent, and by appointment. For her part, Yosra, who starred in Youssef Chahine's controversial film *The Emigrant*, denied having ever seen the officer before he broke into her house this week.

According to the testimony of the actress's maid, Jihan Hamdan, the drama unfolded at 5pm on Sunday when a man, claiming to be a postman, rang the apartment's doorbell. Yosra was not inside at the time. Once the door was opened, the man, who was armed with a pistol, pushed back the maid and forced his way inside. The man then donned a mask and attempted to spray her face with an anaesthetic. When she resisted he gagged her with a napkin.

The man later went into Yosra's bedroom and tore up a bedsheet which he used to tie up the maid. He untied her when the telephone rang so she could answer the call. The servant claimed that she was told by the assailant that he needed LE30,000 for medical treatment for his dying son. In a contradictory version of the servant's testimony, she was quoted as claiming that the man told her he had been paid LE30,000 by another movie star, presumably a rival, to kill Yosra.

In the meantime, Yosra was busy shooting a film on location and then visiting her mother in Helipolis. After she was driven back to a friend's apartment in Zamalek, she sent her driver to her own apartment to pick up some food. When the driver did not return, she telephoned the maid to inquire about what was happening. According to published stories of her testimony, it was only in the second phonecall, that the servant whispered over the telephone that a "thief" was inside the apartment.

Yosra immediately telephoned the police and then rushed to her apartment, accompanied by her woman friend and three men — a porter, a car attendant and a cook. She reportedly testified that she used her key to open the door and was immediately pulled inside by a masked man, who brandished a pistol in her face, threatening to kill her. Her woman friend ran downstairs, screaming for help.

According to the published testimony, the maid informed Yosra that he desperately needed money to treat his son. She offered to give him however much he wanted if he gave her his pistol. But at this point pistol shots rang outside the apartment, indicating that help was on the way. The man pleaded with



Years

her not to obstruct his escape. Relenting, she opened a back door for him and he jumped into a neighbouring, vacant, apartment where he was arrested shortly afterwards. Yosra described as "dumbfounded" her servant's reported claim that a movie rival had hired the officer to kill her. She also said the assailant was completely sober.

Published accounts of Abul-Rouss's version of the story differed wildly. In one version, he was quoted as saying that he was having an affair with Yosra and had arrived at her apartment by appointment. Another report quoted him as saying that he was a great fan of Yosra's and was under the influence of drugs when he arrived at her apartment. He denied that he had been paid money by another movie actress to kill Yosra.

Colleagues of the officer described him as perfectly normal and said that he had done nothing out of the ordinary since his graduation from the police academy in 1992. He has been married for two years and is the father of a one-year-old child.

Testifying again before prosecution officials yesterday, Abul-Rouss said that he was involved in an affair with Yosra about four years and a half ago, but the relationship had ended with his marriage. On Sunday, he said, he went to her apartment by appointment and at her request, because she wanted to consult with him about some of her problems, including a lawsuit filed against her for appearing semi-nude on the cover of a cinema magazine. He said he waited for her at her apartment for three hours.

Obituary

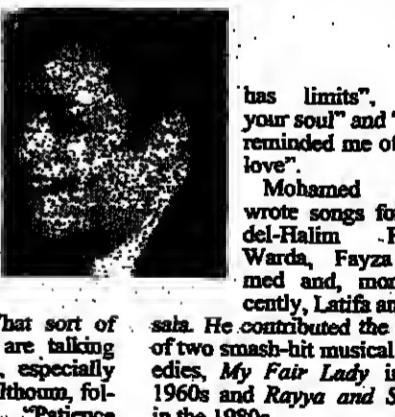
First were the words

ABDEL-WAHAB MOHAMED, a popular songwriter, died on Monday at the age of 65 after a struggle with illness lasting nearly 15 years. Mohamed was admitted to hospital two weeks ago, suffering from diabetes, semi-paralysis and a heart condition. He was released last Thursday, but was rushed back to hospital on Sunday night and died there the following morning.

Mohamed began a career as a songwriter in 1950 after gradu-

ating from the Arabic Music Institute. But it was 10 years later that he shot to stardom, when Um Kalthoum, the Arab world's greatest woman singer, sang one of his lyrics: "What sort of love is that you are talking of?" Other songs, especially recently, Latifa and As-

sala, he contributed the lyrics of two smash-hit musical comedies, *My Fair Lady* in the 1960s and *Raya* and *Sekina* in the 1980s.



Death sentence for six returnees

THE SUPREME Military Court sentenced six Islamist militants to death last Saturday after convicting them of conspiring to blow up public installations and assassinating high officials in a case dubbed by the local press as "the returnees from Sudan".

The court, which began hearings in early December, sentenced seven more defendants to terms of imprisonment with hard labour ranging from one to 10 years, and an eighth to 10 years imprisonment. Six others were acquitted.

Those given the death sentence were first defendant Ahmed Abdel-Aziz Fawaz, second defendant Haggag Gomaa Selim, third defendant Hassan El-Sayed El-Behere, fifth defendant Zakaria Mohamed Bashir, sixth defendant Salih Saad Awad and seventh defendant Mustafa Abdel-Hamid.

In pronouncing sentence, the court said the first and second defendants, in cooperation with others, had smuggled large quantities of weapons and ammunition into the country across the Egyptian-Sudanese border "with the intent of sowing terror and panic in the hearts of innocent people".

The court said that a militant known as Ahmed Hassan Abd el-Gaffar, killed in a shootout with police during a raid on his hideout in the southern town of Kom Ombo, had provided

the third, seventh, 17th and 19th defendants, as well as others, with advanced paramilitary training in Afghanistan.

They later flew back to Sudan and from there infiltrated across the desert border to carry out their criminal scheme". A large shipment of weapons and explosives had arrived ahead of them and was in the hands of the first and second defendants.

The police investigation proved that the militants had the support of the Sudanese National Islamic Front, led by Hassan Al-Turabi, and had received paramilitary training in camps outside Khartoum. The "spiritual father" of the group was said to be the notorious terrorist Mustafa Haniza who, according to reports in the local press, is running a transit station in Khartoum for militants returning from Afghanistan who are subsequently sent across the border into Egypt. Haniza is also suspected of being one of the architects of last June's abortive attempt on the life of President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa.

The court described the defendants as "renegades who sold themselves to the devil, bent on destroying their homeland with their own hands, obsessed with the dream of domination and using religion as a cover. But what sort of religion is it that allows them to sow fire and brimstone on earth?"

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

48/30:50

MPs debate sewage to blast US aid

A parliamentary debate over a US grant turned sour as MPs fixed the entire US economic aid programme in their cross-hairs. **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

Since its inception in the early 1980s, the US-funded Alexandria sewage project has generated a good deal of controversy. But last week the issue came to a head as both majority and opposition MP's used the project as a springboard to criticise the overall performance of the American economic aid programme.

MP's charged that the US is using grant assistance to further its interests in the region. They also asserted that large amounts of the economic assistance to Egypt are misappropriated, with huge amounts of that aid being earmarked for American consulting firms, experts, research and studies.

El-Badri Farghal, a Port Said MP for the leftist Tagammu Party, claimed that the main objective of the Alexandria sewage grant is to prevent Egypt from becoming a large wheat producer, by ensuring that sewage water is drained into the sea, and not used for irrigation.

"The objective of this grant, which began with \$60 million in funds and increased to \$404 million, is to prevent the use of drainage water in agriculture," said El-Badri. "These kinds of grants are a major reason behind the deteriorating state of the cotton and wheat crops. We support grants, but not to the detriment of the nation's economy. This is a grant provided by a state to serve its interests in the area."

The Minister of Housing and Reconstruction, Mohamed Ibrahim Soliman, said that the government itself opposes draining water into the sea, but "the American side just argued that industrial waste is very dangerous and detrimental if drained into the land". But, said Soliman, before draining into the sea, this kind of water is first chemically treated in order not to pollute the environment.

The discussion was soon diverted to a criticism of US economic assistance in general when Hamdi El-Tahan, an National Democratic Party (NDP) MP from Behira, criticised the manner in which US aid grants are allocated. He called upon the government to charge the Central Auditing Agency with the responsibility of monitoring the allocation of these grants.

"Regarding this grant, we have said many times before that the funds allotted to studies should not be surpassed," said El-Tahan, adding "but now amounts allocated here for studies of the sewage project totalled more than \$130 million."

Omar Abu-Steit, an independent from Sohag, and Tawfiq Abu Ismail, an NDP MP from Daqahliya, also agreed with El-Tahan.

"Why we should set aside a large portion of the US's assistance to things which we do not need?" asked Ismail.

However, amid press reports that the US budget crisis will force the US government to slash its foreign aid disbursements, John Westley, the director of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Egypt asserted that the American assistance to Egypt, over the coming years, will remain unchanged, writes Sherene Abdel-Razek.

According to Westley, who was speaking to members of the Rotary Club last week, US assistance to Egypt exceeds the \$2 billion mark, with \$815 million slated for economic aid and the rest for military assistance.

Japan bends on business

Japanese investors are increasingly viewing investment in Egypt as a worthwhile endeavour, writes Niveen Wahab

A 30-man Japanese economic delegation from the Japan Cooperation Centre for the Middle East (JCCME) was in Cairo last week to examine potential investment opportunities.

The five-day visit was intended as follow-up to a similar mission by Japanese businessmen who visited Egypt three years ago. It also aimed to explore the means of improving and strengthening economic and business relations between the two countries.

Headed by Yotaro Lida, the JCCME's president, the delegation was comprised of a number of top managers from various small and medium-

scale Japanese companies.

Speaking at a press conference, Jo Kojima, director of JCCME, said that members of the delegation were very satisfied with the outcome of the visit. According to Kojima, "The Egyptian economy has progressed tremendously over the past three years."

Ambassador Osama Mashaaly, director of the Japan and Two Koreas department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also described the mission as a successful one. "Their meetings with the various officials and businessmen improved the negative impression of the Egyptian economy which the first mission had left with."

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Edited by Ghada Ragab

Buying booms for fasting month



With Ramadan around the corner, consumers find themselves dipping deeper into their pockets to adequately prepare for the festivities. **Mona El-Fiqi** reports



Crowding for cheap yameesh in downtown Cairo

photo:Sherif Sorbol

The fasting, feasting and festivities during the holy month of Ramadan are generally viewed as good for the mind, spirit and body. But for retailers, this month is also good for business.

Consumers, while they still have the energy, gear up for the upcoming month with housewives grappling with the family budget in order to set aside enough for the increase in spending that goes hand-in-hand with Ramadan preparations.

Mustafa Zaki, secretary-general of the Cairo Chamber of Commerce, noted that the average consumption of foodstuffs always increases during Ramadan, especially with regards to sugar, butter and flour.

Before, during and after Ramadan, said Zaki, people's buying habits undergo a change. For example, he noted, before Ramadan, those families households that do not own a television often go out and purchase one so that they can watch the special programmes aired during that month. Thus, not only foodstuffs but TV and electronics retailers view the few weeks preceding this holy month as a key sales period.

But television is just not the same without some snacks on the coffee table. "The last two weeks before Ramadan, people begin to buy Yameesh, an

assortment of dried fruits and nuts," said Zaki. "In the first week of Ramadan, they begin to increase their purchase of meat, chicken and vegetables, while the second and third weeks are characterised by bulk purchases of flour, butter and sugar to make kakk (feast cookies) for the feast. But in the last week of the holy month, people like to eat fish and buy new shoes and clothes for their children," he explained.

To match the supply with the increased demand, the government tries to ensure that consumer needs are met. Mohamed El-Said Saleh, under-secretary of the Ministry of Supply and Trade (MST), said MST Minister Ahmed Goweli held several meetings recently with heads of the ministry's different departments to study the preparations necessary for this month.

He said that the MST provided cooperatives and grocery stores with additional quantities of the main foodstuffs and supplies demanded, such as sugar, flour, cooking oil, meat and butane gas bottles. The average consumption of these commodities, said Saleh, always goes up by nearly 50 per cent.

According to Saleh, around 125,000 tonnes of sugar were thrust onto the market this year, exceeding the public's consumption of the commodity last Ramadan by 25,000 tonnes. In addition, 30,000 tonnes of flour found their way to store shelves, also exceeding last year's demand by 10,000 tonnes.

However, despite efforts to properly prepare and plan, there are always situations where problems emerge. To handle these complaints, the ministry has also created an emergency office which is open 24 hours a day.

The MST, stated Saleh, plays an important role in ensuring that consumers find enough of what they want in terms of foodstuffs. The ministry has entrusted the General Authority of Food Supplies with the task of buying additional quantities of the most sought after commodities in order to guard against any shortages. In theory, this should prevent such unsavoury surprises as last year's shortage of sugar, and the tomato crisis that climaxed a few months ago. "Our ministry always gives priority to lower and middle income households," Saleh added.

As Ramadan draws near, many housewives complain that they have to double their spending during Ramadan. After all, more food means more money spent.

Ibrahim Saber, a civil servant, said that she always puts aside extra money for Ramadan, but it is often not enough. Complaining about the Egyptians' propensity to go overboard in food purchases during this month, she said that this year she bought Yameesh from the cooperative affiliated with the post office where she works. The prices there, Saber explained, are cheaper. "I bought only dates, coconuts and apricots since the other kinds of nuts are beyond my means," she said. "Our budget is already stretched to the limit during Ramadan."

Ahmed Attia, a pensioner who was searching for high quality dates at reasonable prices in the supermarket, complained that the price of these tasty treats ranges from LE5 to LE16 per kilo. To make a bad situation worse, he stated, he has not bought the Yameesh yet. If, he said, a bargain cannot be found, the family will have to fall back on traditional favourites which are cheaper than the Yameesh such as peanuts and Oriental sweets.

To help cut spending, Attia revealed that the secret to power buying during Ramadan is to store additional quantities of butter and sugar over the months in order to set aside the money for other yummies like Yameesh.

Market report

No rebound yet

THE GENERAL Market Index, for the second week in a row, has dropped, this time by 0.89 points to close at 211.01 for the week ending 11 January. The volume of transactions also declined, with trading equaling LE36.2 million compared to LE51 million the week before.

Once again, the manufacturing sector's index suffered a decline, slipping by 1.57 points to level off at 278.27. This drop in the index was primarily a result of a loss in the share values of 12 companies, the most notable of which was the Extracted Oils Company. Its shares lost LE2.11 per share to close at LE40.15. Shares of the Abu Keir Fertilisers Company fell by LE1 to level off at LE40.99.

Although it captured the highest share of market transactions in terms of the number of shares traded, the Helwan Portland Cement Company's shares fell by LE0.25 to close at LE36.2 it traded 51,825 shares on the exchange.

Other companies, however, witnessed an increase in share value. The Egypt Sponge Company (Misr Foun) and the General Company for Paper Manufacturing (RAKTA) both gained LE0.5 per share to round the week off at LE81 and LE29, respectively.

The financial sector also had a rough week of trading, with its index closing 0.61 points lower than when it opened last week at 224.23 points. Shares of the Commercial International Bank fell by LE5 per share to close at LE485. Nevertheless, trading of its shares accounted for 37.5 per cent of total market transactions, or LE13.56 million in shares. On the upswing, the Port Said for In-

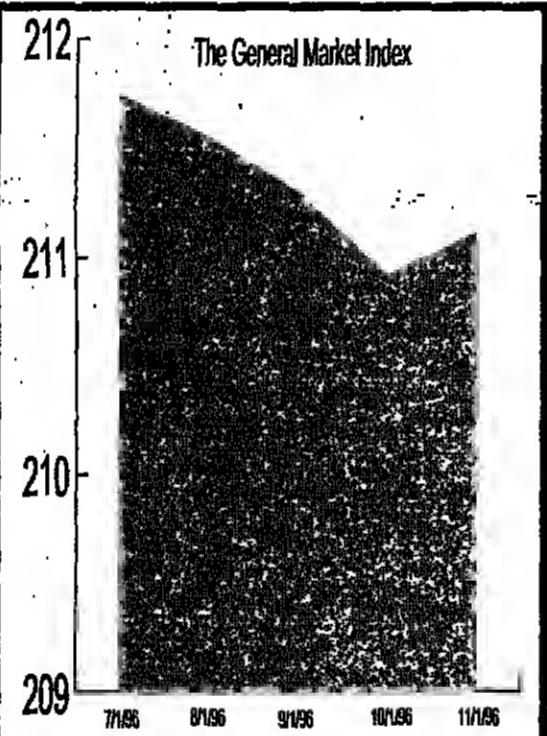
vestment and Industrial Development Company recorded the greatest share value increase. Its shares jumped in value by 15 per cent to close at LE115. Shares of the United Company for Housing and Development, however, suffered the greatest losses. They lost 9.68 per cent of their value to close at LE16.52.

In all, the shares of 21 companies increased in value, 18 decreased and 33 remained unchanged.

Following a period of moderate increase in the Capital Market in October and November, the year drew to a close with trading declining slightly in December. Analysts attributed this decline to a decrease in the share values after year-end profit announcements and the distribution of expected shares.

Market maladies

Mona Qassem reviews December's market activity



The total volume of transactions plummeted by 23 per cent, or LE122,918 million. The value of shares traded fell from LE532,625 million to LE409,707 million in December. A total of 172 companies traded shares on the market during the month, of which 46 suffered a loss, 33 witnessed an increase in share value and 83 were unaffected.

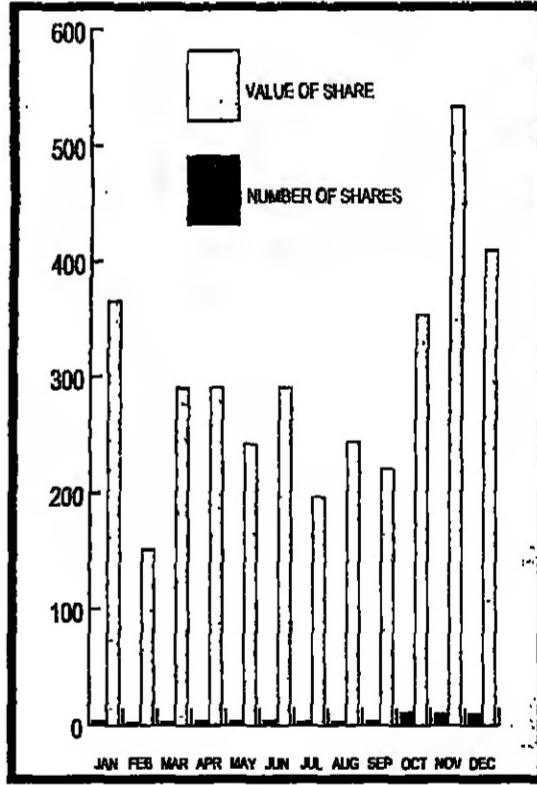
The number of shares traded decreased by 50,721 shares to equal 10,471 million compared to November's level of 10,522 million. Market experts cited the decline in market activity as the product of shareholder disappointment about the announced dividends of public sector companies. In addition, profits fell short of investor expectations, and far below the promised 12 per cent. Investors had been attracted to this as it exceeded the interest rate offered by banks on deposits. Disgruntled and disillusioned, many shareholders sold their stocks, causing a sharp decrease in the total trading volume.

However, despite the disappointing dividends, traders say that these companies' financial positions are still promising as they possess abundant reserves and capitalised profits.

Throughout the month, there were some noteworthy examples of companies which did not deliver as expected. The Egypt for Electric Cables Company (Kabilat) announced an LE8.3 dividend, a figure which is far below its market value. Following this announcement, frustrated shareholders rushed to sell their stocks in order to avoid capital losses. This, in turn, led to a LE12 drop in the company's share value, leaving stock value hanging at LE94 per share at the end of the month. In another example, shares of the North Cairo Mills lost LE5.6 per share to close at LE69 compared to November, where the stocks levelled off at LE75.

Shares of the Misr for Chemical Industries witnessed an LE1.65 loss, dropping from LE20.15 to LE18.5 per share.

The Eastern Tobacco Company's shareholders were



also surprised by the company's performance on the market. The company promised investors an LE4 dividend, but few were cheering. Throughout the month, the value of its shares did not exceed LE45.63 per share, a figure which also did not garner much applause.

With the performance of the market so poor, analysts have expressed their fear that shareholders may remove their capital from the market and re-invest it in real estate or, simply, put it back into savings accounts in the bank.

Lisez dans



Elections palestiniennes

Le test de la démocratie

Hervé de Charette,

chef de la diplomatie française

Donner un nouvel élan économique

à la Palestine

Frères musulmans

Le parti pris de la légalité

Ahmad Belal

Le symbole de la réussite du hand égyptien

Au menu du Ramadan

Les bonnes résolutions



Rédacteur en Chef

Exécutif

Mohamed Salmaawy

Président
et Rédacteur en Chef
Ibrahim Nafie

Embarking on their first-ever 'national' elections, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza seemed well-aware of the many shortcomings of next Saturday's poll — both in terms of limited sovereignty and incomplete democracy. They complain of Oslo's injustices, the PNA's alleged electoral malpractices, the disfranchisement of diaspora Palestinians, the pre-eminence of Arafat's Fatah, of males, of clan and tribal loyalties. Nevertheless, most Palestinians, even many in opposition ranks, are enthusiastically taking part in the poll. The path towards full sovereignty and democracy, they feel, must begin somewhere



A wheelchair-bound Palestinian engineer leads a parade of supporters for his election campaign in Nablus, the West Bank. The candidate was partially paralysed by an Israeli bullet in 1993 (photo: AFP)

Making a start

With hours to go before the Palestinian elections, Sherine Bahaa asks experts how democratic they are going to be

More than one million Palestinians are now readying themselves for the big day on Saturday. Around 1,700 polling stations in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem are expected to open their gates to voters at 7.00 am, 20 January. Voters will place a red ballot paper in a red box to choose the president and a white ballot paper in a white box to select council members.

The elections are unprecedented. Never before have Palestinians been asked in vote for a government. It is not, however, a national election because more than half the Palestinians in the world — those living in Israel and those scattered round the Middle East and elsewhere — will not be taking part.

Nader Sakkia, a Palestinian lawyer, believes that the elections are a preliminary step towards democracy but that the establishment of a Palestinian state needs much more than that. "For Palestinians to practise their right in choosing their representatives is a positive gesture in itself along the road to democracy," he commented.

Election to the Palestinian Council is by a first-past-the-post majority system. Running for the 88 seats on the council is a total of 700 candidates, including 28 women.

Manwai Hassassyan, political science professor at Bethlehem University, believes that the elections will be a peaceful shift from one authority to another. "Yet," he said, "this does not necessarily mean democracy because elections can take place in countries with a one-party system."

On top of the new council's agenda is scrapping articles in the PLO charter that call for or even hint at Israel's destruction. The council has to do this within the first two months or else talks with the Israelis will come to a halt. Arafat tried to convince the late Israeli Premier Yitzhak Rabin to cancel that condition since, in his opinion, the PLO's recognition of Israel as a state was enough. But to no avail.

The majority of candidates in the elections are Arafat supporters, running either as Fatah lists or as independents. One independent candidate described this mood as unhealthy

and warned of the dangers of Fatah gaining absolute power. Fatah is predicted to achieve a landslide victory in the council election.

Yacoub Haddadin, head of the Gaza Centre for Rights and Law, regards the election as the legal way of establishing a system of government in the territories. "I hope there is going to be a difference between the executive authority — the government which will be appointed by the council — and the legislative one — the council," she said. The council is supposed to be an interim council with "legislative and executive capacity", as the Israelis have termed it.

There are actually two established systems within the Occupied Territories. The one in Gaza is mainly a legacy of the British mandate with the addition of some Palestinian rulings which were approved by the legislative council when it was under Egyptian administration. The other is in the West Bank and is mostly Jordanian. "We really need a legislative council to draw up our laws and unite the two sys-

tems into one," said Haddadin.

A further problem involves restrictions placed on candidates from East Jerusalem. Candidates must have valid addresses outside the city, to preserve the Israeli fantasy that the area is not part of Palestine.

Haddadin explained that, according to the Palestinian electoral law, candidates must possess a blue identity card which had been filed through a joint Israeli-Palestinian committee.

"It is not a Palestinian decision," she said. "We cannot grant Palestinian nationality to anyone until the Israeli authorities have given their approval. People have to come to the territories in accordance with national numbers registered on Israeli documents."

Nonetheless, Israeli forces have prohibited East Jerusalem candidates from putting up campaign posters inside the city limits. Hanan Ashrawi, a former Palestinian spokeswoman in the peace talks, is among candidates to have had campaign cars turned back from the city limits.

This event, together with the brief detention of a Palestinian candidate last Sunday, has fuelled complaints of Israeli interference. International observers as well have strongly criticised the conditions surrounding campaigning, accusing Arafat's Palestinian Authority of virtually excluding independent candidates from access to the media.

The head of the European Union observers and a former minister of justice in Sweden, Carl Lidborn, told the Weekly that there had been a lot of delay.

"The electoral law itself was expected to appear earlier than it did," he said. "There was also a delay in appointing members of the Palestinian Central Electoral Committee and a consequent delay in the distribution of seats to constituencies."

But Lidborn attributed this last delay to the Israeli authorities, who increased the number of seats in the council at the last minute.

The media monitoring group, Reporters Sans Frontières, found that in the 10 days to 25 December Fatah

was given more than 16 minutes of TV coverage. Only one other party was given any air time at all — and it only had around 20 seconds.

A second ballot is being held for the position of head of the executive authority. The Israeli authorities insist on calling the position *ra'is* rather than head of state. Hassassyan regards the Israeli attitude as a complete rejection of the fact that a Palestinian state is on the horizon. "It is only through negotiations and peace talks that we can reach our goal," he said.

According to observers, the elections give the Palestinian control of just three per cent of the West Bank. Twenty-seven per cent is under mixed control, leaving 70 per cent of the land exclusively in Israeli hands.

Although the majority of Palestinians feel that the electoral process is being handled in a less than perfect way and that the Israelis have tried to ease the experience, most agree that the step is a positive one. "A lot of people say it does not fulfil our ambitions... Well, Ojeo does not fulfil our ambitions, but we have to make a start," Haddadin concluded.

Hope survives Mossad bullets and lavish promises

The streets of Gaza have been awash with election posters and campaigners from all walks of life. Tarek Hassan sounds out local opinion on the candidates and their programmes

During the last few days a wooden boat, carried on a truck, has been navigating Gaza's streets. Inside it, fishermen have been campaigning for their *ra'is*, or chief fishermen, who has nominated himself for Saturday's elections.

It is not just fishermen who have abandoned the sea recently to navigate the Palestinian electoral current. Representatives of several professions have joined in the campaign despite the boycott by the main Islamist and leftist parties. Pitching in are government employees, workers and academics. Politicians, businessmen and representatives of the Palestinian Authority have joined the campaign, as have technocrats, clans and big business.

Even from within the military, whose members Arafat prohibited from running in the elections, a candidate has appeared. Majid Al-Agha resigned from his military post in order to compete on Fatah's formal electoral list in the city of Khan Younis, in the centre of Gaza. The Fatah list includes two current ministers: Nabil Shaath and Zakariah Al-Agha.

Whatever its longer term results, election fever in Gaza has not been without direct benefits for Gaza's thousands of unemployed. Some of them have found temporary relief by working in campaign promotion. Posters and pictures have taken over wall space in Gaza, while newspapers have been publishing meagre news sections to make room for candidates' promotional advertisements.

The elections in Gaza are a carnival. They could have been called a celebration until the assassination, most likely by the Israeli secret service, Mossad, of one of Hamas' leaders, Yehia Ayash, two weeks ago. After Ayash's assassination, said Omar Fawzi, an independent candidate in Gaza, "I considered withdrawing my nomination more than once, but it was too late. One has to live with the fact that this violation of human life goes on."

One young Gazan, Ashraf Hamed, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Ayash's assassination had "confused" his thinking. "I cannot decide whether to vote or not," he said.

Ayash's assassination has given rise to scepticism. Mahmoud Qassas commented: "The election campaign is a big lie. The multitude of campaign slogans and the unrealistic programmes have brought about jokes and satire, rather than support for the candidates. One candidate, for instance, promised the voters inside a refugee camp in Gaza that he would build a complete residential city at his expense. Others made outright promises to dismantle and remove the Israeli settlements."

Palestinian researcher Ali Al-Khalili agreed with this sentiment. "The electoral slogans became standing jokes because the voters know the true capabilities of the candidates," he said. Khalil Al-Ghazal, a local journalist, complained that there was nothing to choose between the candidates' programmes: "The diversity lies in the names, posters, pictures and families running in the elections, and the campaign budgets. But there are no substantive differences between the candidates."

Discussions and support for the candidates have taken place mainly in private gatherings. There have been public debates as well, but only to a very minimal extent. Cars roar the city, parading pictures of the candidates and carrying loudspeakers which blare out their promotional slogans. Present in all of these manifestations of support have been advocates, relatives and allies who might share a common interest with the candidates.

In Gaza, Fatah is said to be competing against Arafat. Arafat is assured victory — despite the presence of Samiha Khalil as a rival candidate for the presidency. Nonetheless, ordinary Palestinians in Gaza are at least confident that the forthcoming elections will move them one step closer to independence from Israeli occupation.

Boycott backfires

The boycott of the elections by the main left-wing opposition groups has not gone down well with all its supporters, reports Julie Till in the West Bank

It is hard to push the party line when you don't really believe in it. But Mohammed Jadalil, a West Bank leader of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), makes a good attempt at it. Sitting in his home in Beit Safafa, a village on the edge of Jerusalem, he lists the reasons why the party faithful should not be making their way to the polls on 20 January.

The majority of Palestinians who live outside the West Bank and Gaza Strip are excluded from the process. Then there is the special status of Palestinians living in Jerusalem. International observers will not be able to monitor the elections in Jerusalem as in the rest of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Voters will have to use envelopes rather than ballot boxes to send their votes.

Election candidates have been prevented from entering the city. As a consequence, says Jadalil, a distinction has been made between "me in Jerusalem, my sister living in Ramallah and my brother living in Jordan".

Its not just who is voting and how, argues Jadalil. The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) cannot, by its very nature, be democratic. It has a definite function, which is to implement the Oslo accords. "So if I go against those accords by claiming sovereignty or control over water for agriculture, it will be the job of the PNA to stop me," he said. Jadalil claims further that PLO leader Yasser Arafat is seeking legitimacy for his rule, rather than a counterweight to his present omnipotence. "Arafat has always operated above the rule of democracy. Now he wants to dec-

orate his mandate with names and figures from other groups".

And yet, near the end of the interview Jadalil lets slip that he in fact spent four days in Damascus in October, arguing in vain that the DFLP should participate in the elections for a legislative council in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

He was not alone. Raid Malki, a West Bank leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), made the same case — and lost. But Malki is more outspoken. This decision to boycott the elections was made by "people who want to live in the past".

Under pressure from the party, Malki withdrew his own candidacy, but he is ignoring the call to boycott the elections. "I am going to vote and I am calling on everyone else in do so," he said. There are two other prominent PFLP members who have broken ranks: Fawz Khalifa, who is standing no a Fatah list in Ramallah, and Ghazi Abu Jibril, who is on Haider Abd-Shafiq's Democratic Freedom Movement's ticket in the Gaza Strip.

The elections were an excellent opportunity — perhaps unique — for the opposition to regroup itself, laments Malki. "We should have taken advantage of them to rebuild our structures and finances, to rejuvenate our slogan and speeches." Just running in the elections would have strengthened the democratic trend within the PFLP, he believes.

That opportunity was lost according to Palestinian intellectual Azmi Bishara. The elections "could have been an instrument for reforming the nation, divided by Oslo". Instead,

he says, the elections have been brought down to sub-national levels, to that of the tribe and region. For Bishara, the elections have proved to be deeply disappointing. "It's a kind of festival with the most important thing — politics — missing," he said.

Some have blamed the electoral law, at least in part, for the depoliticisation of the election campaign in the West Bank. Abdel-Latif Geith, a PFLP leader in the West Bank, and Abdel-Shafi in the Gaza Strip blamed the decision to create 16 constituencies for increasing the traditional influence of the tribe. Khalil Shekaki, director of the Centre for Palestinian Research and Studies in Nablus, also believes that had there been proportional representation rather than the simple majority system in each constituency, the opposition may have been more inclined to participate.

If there had been such a contest between Fatah and the left-Islamic opposition, most of the pro-Oslo, pro-Arafat "independents" could have been squeezed out. A national political agenda could have been set "around how liberal our society should be, our relationship with Israel, a secular or religious identity, the role of women". Instead, says Khalil, voters in Hebron and Nablus are more likely to be influenced by traditional loyalties than policies.

And so it is in the Al-Sharq coffee shop in the centre of Ramallah, where the sweet tea and water pipes are provided free courtesy of independent candidate Jamil Turfat. The talk is of the 18 cars he owns, his cement and asphalt company and his membership of the Joint Civil Liaison Committee, appointed by PLO leader Yasser Arafat.

The opposition, charges Khalil, "has shot it in the foot". In particular, it was a chance for the left to provide an alternative to the religious right and the semi-secular pragmatism of Fatah. This nationalist-democratic-secular bloc has a definite constituency among the Palestinian people according to Bishara. The problem was with a leadership which "did not see the importance of elections, but saw only Osnas".

But there are new realities now, argues Jadalil. Palestinian land is still under occupation, but things have changed. "For a start, we can organise openly and we can set out our own agenda in certain fields like, health, he said.

"The elections are a turning point," agrees Malki. However limited its powers may be, the new council will start to legislate and it will have the soldiers to ensure implementation. "People will be talking not just about the occupation, but about unemployment, education, women."

Fear of losing the initiative to the inside may have been a factor in the decision of the PFLP and DFLP to boycott the elections. But changes may come regardless. Malki predicted that after the elections two camps would emerge. One will "still wear the old combat fatigues". The other may be willing to hand on an ANC-style opposition with other groups and individuals "where the only qualification would be a commitment to democracy".

Discussions and support for the candidates have taken place mainly in private gatherings. There have been public debates as well, but only to a very minimal extent. Cars roar the city, parading pictures of the candidates and carrying loudspeakers which blare out their promotional slogans. Present in all of these manifestations of support have been advocates, relatives and allies who might share a common interest with the candidates.

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A memorial rally for the Hamas bomb-maker Yehya Ayyash in the West Bank town of Jenin (photo: AP)

On the campaign trail

Salah Tamari is tipped to win a council seat in the Bethlehem area. Graham Usher follows the local boy and former Fatah fighter on his election campaign

It is a cold January night in Betier, a small village east of Bethlehem. Around 100 men and boys — women tend not to attend political meetings in Palestine's villages — are squeezed into a tiny youth club, a room equipped only with plastic chairs and a single billiard table. The fluorescent light picks up the men's unfurling breath, but also their rapt attention. They have come to listen to one of the 31 candidates contesting the four seats allocated in the Bethlehem area on the new Palestinian Council.

He is Salah Tamari, an independent candidate but one who many feel is the front runner for one of the two Muslim seats assigned in Bethlehem. His biography encapsulates why.

Tamari was born in Bethlehem in 1941 to a large Bedouin clan. But since 1965 his personal history has been inseparable from that of the Palestinian national struggle. In 1965, he joined Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, a decision that "disrupted" his studies in English literature at Cairo's Ain Shams University. He fought the Israelis during the Six-Day War and again in 1968 at Karameh in Jordan, a battle which for many in the Arab world signalled the arrival of Fatah's guerrillas as the leading force in the Palestinian revolution. After the Black September debacle in Jordan, Tamari became a commander in the PLO's military in Lebanon, resisting the Israeli invasions in 1979 and 1982.

He was imprisoned by Israel in its notorious Anser jail in occupied South Lebanon, where he gained international renown as the eloquent and charismatic spokesperson for the jail's Palestinian, Lebanese and other Arab detainees. Released in 1984, he spent the dark years of the PLO's Tunis exile as a "roving emissary" for the Palestinian national movement in Tunisia, Algeria and Washington. Israel finally allowed Tamari to return to Bethlehem in September 1994, "one month after the Chairman", he says. Like Arafat, it was the first time he had set foot on Palestinian soil in 27 years. Commitment in the national struggle counts for a lot in the Palestinian elections. Tamari has that commitment by the bucket.

But the emphasis of his campaign is not on the past. "In crossing the Allenby Bridge I knew I wasn't only covering a geographical distance," he says, "but crossing from one era into another."

Unlike many of the PLO returnees, Tamari did not take up a post in the Palestinian Authority's (PA) new political or security structures. He threw himself rather into what he calls mass work, particularly among the young. "I started scout troops in the eastern villages. They are now 2,000

strong. They are poorly equipped, but their voluntary participation in building schools, roads and kindergartens marks a qualitative step forward in consciousness."

It is a political intervention that Tamari sees as absolutely critical given the changed political realities thrown up by Oslo. "We must redirect the anger of our youth that has accumulated under occupation into constructive channels. Their anger is just, and I share it. But there are ways to resist other than by destroying our society in the name of armed struggle and the Intifada."

The same stress on self-reliance and pragmatic political change is evident at Tamari's campaign rallies. "The question is not whether one is for Oslo or against it," he says at one meeting. "The question is how we confront it. Oslo itself is an unfinished struggle. We still have to fight over issues like settlements, the refugees and Jerusalem."

At another meeting in Al-Dohs near Bethlehem, villagers present Tamari with a petition of grievances, such as their need for a proper waste-water system. Tamari's response is sympathetic but blunt. "Look, I know your problems are severe," he says. "But they are not as severe as the problems of the refugees in Gaza or of those villages in the West Bank that still lack electricity. The PA must have priorities; it can make no promises."

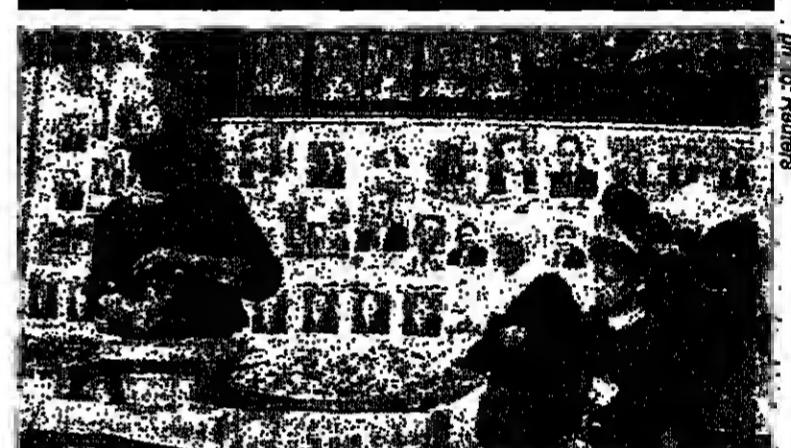
Such honesty goes down well in Al-Dohs, although it is impossible to say whether it will garner Tamari extra votes. Other questions, however, are more difficult to field.

For the people of Bethlehem — and for

many Palestinians across the Occupied Territories — Tamari is Fatah. Why, then, is he not running on the official Fatah list for Bethlehem?

The answer is complicated. In the run-up to the elections, Fatah in Bethlehem held primaries to select their four nominations. Tamari headed the poll. After the decision by Hamas and the PLO opposition factions to boycott the elections, however, both Arafat and Fatah's Central Committee decided that the official list should not be party based, but rather a "national coalition". In Bethlehem, the official Fatah list is headed by George Hazbun, a respected Christian and trade-union activist, but whose political affiliation is the old Palestine Communist Party rather than Fatah. Tamari's decision to run as an independent was made largely in protest at this lack of internal democracy inside his own movement. "The official Fatah list is one thing and Fatah is another," he says. "But, let's be clear, I am Fatah. The conflict is between who the grassroots want to represent them and who the leadership wants to represent it."

After a day of hard campaigning, Tamari sips sweet tea in a makeshift office covered in election posters and abuzz with young Fatah activists. Whether talking of Oslo or of Fatah, for him the main issue in the elections is the same. "The most important thing is credibility. There is a fine line between dreams and illusions. But it is important to think aloud with the people, to be honest about what is possible and what is not. Candidates often underestimate the intelligence and sensitivities of our people," he says with a weary smile.



A street vendor serves food in front of a wall covered in election posters



Three of the 28 women running in the council election: from left to right, Zahira Kamal, Hanan Ashrawi and Rana Nashashibi

Women in the poll

Palestinian women have struggled to liberate their homeland alongside their male compatriots. Are they now expected to return to the kitchen? Mariz Tadros previews women's lot in Saturday's poll

Women will not be fairly represented in the forthcoming Palestinian elections. Out of the 700 candidates standing for the 88-seat council, only 28 are women although 54 per cent of the electorate is female. Allegations of PNA antagonism towards women, as well as towards opposition parties, have sparked fierce debate about the existence of sex discrimination in the elections.

Osama Hussein, an official with the Palestinian Election Commission, denied reports of gender bias in the elections, claiming they were totally democratic. "The only two requirements we have for persons wishing to present their candidature is that they be over the age of 30 and that they present their candidature as independent candidates or elected through a party," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. He insisted that the commission was supportive of women but defended the decision not to reserve 30 seats for women.

Feminist movements, running candidates including Hanan Ashrawi, have lobbied hard for the electoral law to allot 30 seats for women to permit a more balanced representation of the genders in the decision-making body. Their proposal backfired.

Hussein said that the fact Samiha Khalil was Arafat's only rival for the post of president was evidence that women had full opportunities in the election. He explained that the unbalanced ratio of male to female candidates had to do with decisions made by women themselves rather than being a result of debilitating external forces. "Society in general is very receptive to all good candidates, be they male or female. There is no way that women are discriminated against in any way," he affirmed. "They have full and equal rights with men."

Yalla Haddadin, director of the Gaza Centre for Rights and Law, said that equal opportunity was but a facade that did not reflect the real situation for Palestinian women. She told the *Weekly*, "Yes, the door is open. It is open for all women who wish to vote. But to nominate themselves and actually gain the support of the parties or the people is another story." She asserted that women were being denied their fundamental rights under a distorted understanding of democracy. "They say to us Palestinian women: if you want your rights, you have to fight for them. But why should we fight for basic human rights that everybody, male or female, should be entitled to?" she complained.

Haddadin emphasised the discriminatory features of the Personal Status Laws which hinder women's freedom to participate fully in public life. For example, she said, "any woman wanting to obtain the new Palestinian passport must have the written permission of a male guard."

Haddadin explained that many Palestinian women had expected their experience to be different from the rest of the world because they had struggled alongside men for a Palestinian state. But she feels that they will be disillusioned. "Just like in the Algerian revolution, where women fought side by side with men for

the liberation of their country only to be told to go back home to the kitchen once independence was gained, so we are witnessing a similar picture here today," she said.

Haddadin was pessimistic about the chances of any of the 28 female candidates winning seats on the council and more so about the likelihood of Samiha Khalil winning a fair share of the votes in her election battle with Yasser Arafat. "If Hanan Ashrawi does not win a seat in the council, it will be a catastrophe for the fate of Palestinian women in the new Palestinian state because she is one of the very few who articulated clearly an agenda that takes into account the pressing needs and rights of Palestinian women," Haddadin added. "I am positive that if she fails in the elections, it will be because of her gender."

Hanan Ashrawi, who is running as an independent for East Jerusalem, told the *Weekly*, "Part of my social reform programme is dedicated to problems particular to women. There is a need to create and implement legislation that prevents discrimination against women and [to establish] mechanisms geared towards fighting early marriages and domestic violence. Compulsory primary education for girls must also be set up and women's institutions must be created to encourage the empowerment of women."

Concerning the current political scene for women, Ashrawi conceded, "There is an inherent bias in the electoral system itself which allows for gender inequality. For instance, in the elections for the smaller districts, because of the presence of only one or two seats and the tribal and family structures which privilege males over females, it is natural that the male candidate will be chosen over the female one. If there were more seats, the people would have more to make such a choice."

Maha Abdel-Hadi, a Palestinian feminist, told the *Weekly* that there were many subtle forces working against the full participation of both sexes in Palestinian political life. "One of them is the lack of confidence many professional Palestinian women have in their ability to take up leadership roles," she said. "I was surprised that many Palestinian feminists who attended the Beijing conference with me and were some of the fiercest supporters of female empowerment did not even think of presenting their candidature in the elections. On the other hand, many women who may have taken a more active role in the elections did not because they did not have party support. In addition, many women — like some opposition groups — refused to participate in the elections for deeper political reasons such as their objection to the Oslo agreement."

Forgotten at Salloum

Not all Palestinians will be going to the polls on Saturday. Among the diaspora Palestinians, forgotten by Oslo, were more than 200 men, women and children stranded on the border between Egypt and Libya for the past four months. Khaled Dawoud reports from Salloum

For the Bedouin residents of Salloum, the heavy rainstorm which hit their desert area on Monday was a great blessing. But for the more than 200 Palestinians abandoned on the border between Egypt and Libya for months, it was a catastrophe.

Their poorly pitched tents were blown away. Residents of the camp, including many women and children, ran haphazardly looking for shelter while trying to save their few remaining important documents and belongings. But where could one find shelter in an open desert? "We feel we are no longer human beings. Everyone has forgotten us," said Adel Mohamed, who has been in the camp for the past four months.

Like everyone else interviewed by *Al-Ahram Weekly*, he said that Libyans had stopped providing them with assistance after Muammar Gaddafi agreed with Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa in October to stop massing Palestinians on the border between the two countries. He said the United Nations had also stopped its assistance.

Gaddafi, saying he was furious at the peace deal between the PLO and Israel because it did not guarantee Palestinians an independent state, ordered last August the expulsion of all 30,000 Palestinians living in Libya. This highlight the shortcomings of the agreement.

The process was accelerated after the signing of the second part of the agreement between the PLO and Israel in Washington last October, when Israeli self-rule was extended to several Israeli-occupied cities in the West Bank. Palestinians in Libya were sacked from their jobs and told it would

be better if they left willingly. The lucky ones who have residence permits in other Arab countries — mainly Gaza, the West Bank and Jordan — immediately left the country.

Gaddafi, in one of his common political antics, asked all Arab countries to follow his example, and Libyan buses carried hundreds of Palestinians to the border with Egypt, raising the slogan of "either death or return to Palestine".

Now, those who talk politics have disappeared, and the more than 200 Palestinians who are stranded in the camp say they only want a solution to their humanitarian problem. Residents of the camp said that they were living in winter temperatures which fell below zero at night and lacked running water and toilets. They complained that their children were suffering from skin rashes caused by mysterious insect bites and that they were short of food due to deteriorating economic conditions.

In the camp, one hears nothing but tragic stories. Ferial Mohamed Gaser gave birth in a baby boy a few months ago. She said she was taken to a nearby Libyan hospital in the town of Tobruk.

"I heard the baby crying and he looked healthy. All the nurses congratulated me," she said. "A few hours later, they took the baby away and refused to let me see him. The next day, a Libyan doctor told me that the baby had died, but he would not let me see my dead baby or give me a death certificate. He told me I wanted to make a scandal in front of the international media. Until today, only God knows whether my son is dead or alive," she said.

Camp residents said that they were provided with

two car tanks of water each week, but the water was salty which meant they could not drink it. "We are forced to buy mineral water. Those of us who still have some money go to a nearby coffee shop in Mused (the nearest Libyan town to the border) for a shower costing one pound," said Mohamed Afifi, Ferial's husband.

Many of the camp residents, who have no source of income, have resorted to trade: buying cheap Libyan goods — mainly tomatoes, pasta and cooking oil — and selling them to Egyptian merchants. "Even that is not regular, and often the Libyans for no reason prevent us from going to Mused and confiscate the goods," said Goma Abdellatif, who has been stranded with his family on the border between Egypt and Libya for the past six months. He was there even before the camp was built and had to live in a small deserted building which had once been a police station.

The majority of the camp residents carry an Egyptian travel document, which Egypt used to issue to Palestinians living in Gaza when the territory was under Egyptian administration between 1948 and 1967.

But this document does not mean that those who carry it can reside in Egypt; they have to obtain an entry visa and renew a residence permit every few months. After the August 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and the support PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat gave to Saddam Hussein, Palestinians were banned from entering Egypt for nearly two years. There were only a few exceptions and these were made after lengthy and complicated procedures. Many of the Egyptian travel documents issued to

Palestinians expired.

"We do not want to cause any problems. We only want to move away from this area," said Ghassan Ismail, a worker who was forced to leave Libya after the measures taken against Palestinians living there.

"We would accept moving from here to Rafah (on the border between Egypt and Gaza) and continue living in a camp. We are sure the conditions there would be much better as we would be closer to home," said Camillia Amer Al-Ramisi, a mother of four children. They have all been living in the camp for three months.

Residents of the camp told the *Weekly* that many of the Palestinians who had arrived there in October had left as they were members of Gaddafi's revolutionary committees. They said that those Palestinians carried Syrian and Lebanese travel documents and it was they who had caused trouble by crossing the border into Egypt several times over the past two months.

Meanwhile, the desert camp has become a trap for any Palestinian facing trouble crossing the border between Libya and Egypt.

Camp residents now receive visits from their family members who can afford the travel expenses and have residence permits in other countries. Umam Esam came from Gaza to visit her son and Nahabiah Mahmud, an Egyptian, was there to visit her husband and her 18-year-old son.

"There are at least 20 Palestinians here who are married to Egyptian women. As my other three children are below 18, I can take them with me to Cairo. But you can imagine living without my husband and any source of income and the difficulties I have coming here each month to visit him," she said.

If there is to be any joy to lighten life a little for the camp residents, it will be at the wedding which is due to take place today. It will be the first wedding to take place at the camp. Ayman Abdul-Latif, a Palestinian resident of Al-Arish whose father lives in the camp, is marrying Hoda Khassis, who lives in the camp with her mother and a sister. "I bought a nice wedding dress and camp residents have all helped in decorating the tent where we are going to get married," said Hoda. "I want to feel happy and proud like any Palestinian woman getting married. I only hope it will not rain today."



Palestinians at the border camp in Salloum brave the harsh winter

photo: Khaled Dawoud

Wars' sinister turns

Have war-torn Third World countries found a new elixir of economic growth based on drug trafficking, asks Gamal Nkrumah

Smuggling narcotics is a high-risk crime, except in places like Liberia and Afghanistan. Drug trafficking and human rights abuses go hand in hand. Civil wars take a far more sinister turn when the warlords are drug barons and the warriors are drug addicts. The Liberian civil war, like the Afghan one, is fought between drug barons.

War-torn West African nations are discovering that weasing themselves off the illicit narcotics trade is at least as difficult as the shift from military dictatorship to multi-party democracy. Afghanistan, too, has to make a transition to democracy no less difficult than that of West Africa.

Money laundering by the newly rich warlords and drug barons in Third World countries has coupled with pervasive corruption to create economic chaos. Drug barons have taken full advantage of the economic deregulation urged by the Bretton Woods institutions — International Monetary Fund and the World Bank — but industrialists have failed to do so. "Some African governments in liaison with the drug barons and international drug traffickers feel that they are getting back the Bretton Woods institutions which they feel is a good game to play," an African official with the UN International Drug Control Programme told *Al-Ahram Weekly* recently.

The Non-Aligned Movement actions account for seven per cent of world economic output. The poor economic performance of countries with the worst poverty is exacerbated by civil wars. Gross domestic product per capita fell by an average of one per cent in Africa. The least developed countries — including war-torn Liberia and Afghanistan — are fast becoming narcotic exporting ones. There is a correlation between poverty, war and drug trafficking.

In Central and South America, the correlation between war and drugs has been well documented. Cocaine production and exports quickly pursued the trail of blood around the Central American civil wars. The Colombian cocaine cartel was created in 1981 — the same year that four different civil wars erupted in Central America. El Salvador's leftist forces mounted offensives to topple the beleaguered rightist government in the capital, San Salvador. The rightist remnants of the former Nicaraguan dictator Somoza, the so-called Contras, with CIA support launched an all-out attack on the ruling leftist Sandinistas to regain control of Nicaragua. In Guatemala, the forces of leftist and indigenous Americans challenged the central government. Finally, Colombia's leftist M-19 forces fought both the central government in the capital Bogota and the drug barons and their cartels in their strongholds of Cali and Medellin.

The rising curve of cocaine imports to the United States followed almost exactly the flow of US exports of arms and military advisers to Central America. Experts still debate whether there is a causal link — just as they debated the same question about the flow of heroin during the Vietnam War — but the factual coincidence of the cocaine explosion with the Central American crisis [in the 1980s] was indisputable," noted John Dinges in his General Noriega bestseller *Our Man in Panama*.

According to figures from the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the total arms transfers from the US to the war-torn and narcotics-exporting Central American republics rose from \$955 million in 1976 to \$2.8 billion in 1982. Meanwhile, Latin American warlords and drug barons sharply increased their illicit exports of narcotics to the US during that period. A former Peruvian president, Alan Garcia, once remarked that the narcotics trade was "Latin America's only successful multinational".



NPFL leader Charles Taylor

That nothing will do except sustained and determined effort by African governments to stem corruption is not true. Pervasive poverty and empty state coffers are the real problem — not corruption. West African governments are learning to resist the urge to run with the drug traffickers. But there is still a line of governments in the region who are still willing to be paid as little as a couple of million dollars to turn a blind eye and are laundering their ill-gotten money in Europe and America. Persuading them to relinquish the lucrative dabbling with drug trafficking would be as difficult as persuading them to set rules to stop corruption is not a bad bet.

In narrow political terms, West African leaders have little to fear. Western nations are arming Africa to the teeth. Britain might be one of the most vociferous critics of human rights abuses in Nigeria, but it heads the list of countries exporting arms to Nigeria. Last June, Britain issued li-

cences for British CS gas and rubber bullets to be exported to Nigeria. Needless to say, British CS gas and rubber bullets were used to quell popular resistance to the military authorities and to put down peaceful demonstrations.

Britain also issued 30 licences for non-lethal equipment including component parts for tanks and missiles and topped the military list with 20 more licences for British arms exporters to ship machine-guns, bombs, missiles and mines to the politically unstable West African giant. France exported armoured reconnaissance vehicles to Nigeria, Sweden sold it howitzers and Germany, military trucks. Nigeria also bought 300 armoured personnel carriers from Austria.

The West African peacekeeping troops in Liberia are primarily Nigerian nationals, and Nigerian arms dealers and drug barons have been active in the Liberian civil war. African warlords are heavily involved in the narcotics trade. And their foreign arms suppliers are often active in the illicit trade. But if African warlords are directly involved in the drug trade, Western arms exporters are indirectly involved.

According to the Geopolitical Drug Dispatch of February 1994, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and its leader, Charles Taylor, are deeply involved with drug trafficking. The Liberian port of Buchanan was a base for the illegal trade between 1990 and 1992. The port, captured by ECOMOG in 1992, is now once again operated by Taylor's NPFL which also uses the port of San Pedro — 100km away in neighbouring Ivory Coast, where the street prices for Indian hemp and heroin have collapsed because of abundant supply. According to the report, NPFL West African drug traffickers — estimated to number 60,000 in West Africa, Europe and America — are used by the international drug barons as low cost couriers of cocaine and heroin.

Drug barons have taken full advantage of the status of Monrovia, the Liberian capital, as a duty-free port. They have also made much capital out of the political chaos in the West African country. The lack of controls that led the trade to run amok in Liberia is spreading to neighbouring West African countries including Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Nigeria.

The last execution of convicts for drug-trafficking offences in Nigeria was in 1984 when the public execution by firing squad of three youths provoked an international outcry against the regime of the then military ruler of the country General Muhammad Babbari. His successor, General Ibrahim Babangida, abrogated the death penalty for drug trafficking under intensified pressure from local and international human rights groups. The trade in narcotics is now booming.

The current military强人, General Sani Abacha, has so far resisted reintroducing the death penalty for drug trafficking, but this week the head of Nigeria's National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), General Musa Bamaiyi, urged the re-imposition of the death penalty for drug traffickers. Almost 800 people, including 56 women, were arrested on drug-trafficking charges in 1995 and 333 suspects were convicted.

Last year, over 460 luxury cars were seized by the NDLEA when they arrested 27 drug barons. The NDLEA suspected the barons were laundering their cash in imported luxury cars. Drug barons spend their ill-gotten money on imported luxuries and do not invest in the productive sector of the economy. This is the nub of



Two armed female police officers belonging to an elite anti-terrorist force patrol at Manila airport this week. The new force was created as part of the government increased security measure following Manila's crackdown against international terrorists which resulted in the arrest of 35 Pakistani and Middle Eastern nationals (photo: AP)

the notion of the new elixir of economic growth based on drug-trafficking. The trade is a matter of anxiety to decision-makers. The issue is broader than just combating crime; it is inextricably intertwined with democracy and deregulation.

The cutting off of American aid to Pakistan in 1990 was partly related to the control of drug trafficking. Last month, Ayub Khan Afridi gave himself up to officials at the US Embassy in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates. Afridi, an ardent supporter of Pakistani opposition leader Nawaz Sharif who was prime minister from 1990 to 1993, was embroiled in Afghanistan's civil war. Pakistani Premier Benazir Bhutto has been a thorn in Afridi's flesh. She and her government have done their utmost to intercept his alleged drug-trafficking busi-

ness, orchestrated from his mountain stronghold in Landi Kotal in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP).

Afridi, a chieftain of the Zakhid tribal grouping and an ethnic Pashtun, was cleared by the *Tanzim Itehad-i-Ulema wal-Qabail* (the Court of Tribal Judges and Elders) of all drug-trafficking charges. The Pashtuns predominate in Afghanistan, but spill over into Pakistan's NWFP. Afridi is popular among his people. He won a parliamentary seat representing the tribal territories of NWFP in 1990. The tribal areas are notorious for producing vast amounts of opium and hashish.

Despite his democratic credentials, the CIA has long had Afridi on the top of its list of wanted drug-trafficking barons. The US had petitioned Pakistan for his extradi-

tion to no avail so it came as a surprise, therefore, that Afridi turned himself in and the news hit international headlines. The event, like Noriega's demise, brought into sharp focus the nature of America's battle against the world trade in narcotics. Afridi, who flew from the Afghan capital Kabul to Dubai aboard one of his cargo planes, was flown to New York to stand trial. He toyed with America's might.

That Pakistan's Afridi or Liberia's Taylor or Panama's Noriega made their fortune from drug trafficking and arms deals does not exonerate the West. The Third World contends that consuming countries are just as guilty as supplying ones in the narcotics trade — especially since the consumers are also the arms suppliers.

Bangladeshi women at point zero

The message sent by thousands of women protesters in the Bangladeshi capital last week is one that cannot be ignored: it is impossible to address poverty without dealing with gender. Mariz Tadros reports

the wife of the Bangladeshi ambassador in Cairo.

According to Haider's 1991 statistics, a female child under five years of age consumes 16 per cent less calories than the male child and between the ages of five and 14 she consumes 11 per cent less calories than a male of the same age. This is not surprising as males are served first and the female members of the household usually end up with the leftovers. In a family surviving below the poverty line, it may mean little more than some crumbs for the women. The mortality rate due to abandonment, starvation or ill health is generally much higher for females than it is for males. For instance, between the ages of one and four, the female mortality rate is 27 per cent higher. Similarly in education, only 50 per cent of girls enter primary school as opposed to 70 per cent of boys. By secondary level, there are fewer girls still at school because many are forced to stay at home to help their mothers or to get married. Girls can be married off at as early as seven years of age, whereby a girl is betrothed to a particular suitor who waits until she reaches physical maturity before taking her to his home.

Marriages are arranged in the traditional fashion, often conducted with economic considerations in mind rather than for the welfare of the girl-bride. Due to the tradition of dowry payment to the male, the marriage is a burden for the bride's family who often has to go to extremes to provide the bridegroom with his requested dowry. Despite the economic burden, marrying the female off is regarded as less of an encumbrance than keeping her at home as an extra mouth to feed. Moreover, village mores dictate the chastity of the girl to be guaranteed through marriage.

There is little respect for the dignity and rights of the female, who is treated as no more than a casual commodity at the disposal of patriarchal society and its male members. Domestic violence cases are frequent and regarded as a customary characteristic of marital life for peasant girls.

Many women flee their husbands because of the absence of any mechanisms that guarantee their protection from violent husbands. Since their families are often too poor to feed them themselves, they often seek refuge at non-governmental humanitarian institutions until they succeed in getting a divorce. Yet it is more frequent that young peasant girls are divorced rather than seek divorce themselves.

The males, wishing to ameliorate their economic conditions, exploit the dowry system to marry, divorce and remarry, leaving behind a trail of homelessness and destitute young girls, some according to surveys as young as 12 and 13 years of age. Repeated attempts by the government to abolish the dowry system have failed because of the patriarchal nature of society that has resisted the curbing of any rights enjoyed by its male members.

The government's attempts at social reform have been futile, at best in the eyes of the tens of thousands of Bangladeshi women who have experienced acid attacks, burning, domestic assaults, rape and abduction, without being in any position to reclaim their rights, warned the 1995 *Human Rights Watch Report*. Despite a law banning dowry and a death penalty against anyone convicted of throwing acid at women and other rigorous laws against rape and abductions, there are no effective implementation mechanisms due to the lax attitude of judges and law enforcers, who are often sympathetic towards the accused males. Last week, female Bangladeshi peasants demonstrated against half-hearted initiatives taken by the government to treat the causes as well as manifestations of an unequal treatment of genders.

Public opinion seems to be shifting towards laying the blame on the prime minister herself. Ever since her appointment to the post in March 1991, Khaleda Zia has been under continuous pressure by Bangladeshi women to take up the feminist cause on account of her being a woman in authority. Yet

the highly complex web of poverty, ignorance, chauvinism and corruption has meant that no quick solution can be effective.

According to the human rights report, many poor Bangladeshi women are now entangled in the international sex trade. The trafficking of Bangladeshi women, with an average age of 15, to Pakistan for domestic service and sex purposes has been going on for the last 10 to 15 years. Some were lured with promises of a better life, a decent job and a roof over their heads and others were and are forcefully abducted. In both cases, unsuspecting women are either transported to India and then Pakistan or more likely transported to India and then forced to walk across the Indian-Pakistani border. It is in the slums of the Pakistani metropolis of Karachi that they end up becoming the victims of an increasingly growing flesh trade. Once they have been sold to husbands or forced into prostitution, the idea of returning home is inconceivable. Employers threaten to report them to the Pakistani authorities where they can be charged for adultery under *Shari*'s stipulations.

The report states that when police crack down on brothels, "instead of protecting the Bangladeshi women and girls by arresting those accountable for their illegal sale and forced prostitution or forced marriage, the Pakistani government has imprisoned the women and girls while allowing most brokers to go free." The Bangladeshi government is to bear the blame just as much as the Pakistani government. The repatriation of Bangladeshi women is often objected to by the authorities who deny them entry back into their own country. Despite the fact that the trafficking of women and girls is a crime punishable by death, few attempts are made to crack down on the offenders, and fewer still are the sentences passed on those suspected of smuggling women and children across the borders.

The plight of poor Bangladeshi women has worsened: if it is not blatant violation of their basic human rights at home, it is forced slavery and prostitution abroad. The fact that the female prime minister's government cannot act beyond passing a series of empty legislative measures has not improved their lot in any visible manner. Economic destination cannot be addressed if half the nation's population is kept down.

Warlord extradition

OPUM warlord Khun Sa, who operates in the war-torn so-called Golden Triangle encompassing Burma, Thailand and Laos, is awaiting possible extradition to the United States to face drug-trafficking charges this week. Washington has not formally requested Khun Sa's extradition from the Burmese authorities. The warlord is reported to be negotiating a deal for his surrender with Burma's military rulers, demanding a written guarantee that he will not be extradited to America.

A 1947 bilateral extradition treaty signed between the US and the then Burmese provisional government — just before Burma's independence from Britain — legitimises Khun Sa's extradition. Khun Sa was indicted in New York in December 1989 on 10 drug-trafficking charges. The US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Winston Lord, disclosed that Khun Sa was responsible for at least half the heroin that reaches America today.

Boat people discussed

VietNAMESE boat people were the subject of discussion at a meeting organized this week in the Thai capital, Bangkok, for Asian host countries of Vietnamese refugees and representatives of Western humanitarian aid and relief agencies.

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Hong Kong are the main destination of Vietnamese asylum seekers. Vietnam, itself a member of ASEAN, has been accused of using delaying tactics in processing applications for repatriation. But Vietnam points out that 72,000 boat people have been repatriated with financial aid from Western donors.

China demands that 22,000 boat people must leave Hong Kong by the time it comes under Chinese control in July 1997. Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand have also at various times threatened to deport the Vietnamese boat people.



Photo: Reuters

Mitterrand, the Aswan group and Arafat

My last meeting with François Mitterrand took place in May 1994 during a UNESCO conference entitled "What about development?" Mitterrand had suggested the conference's theme after discussing it with me and a number of intellectuals, such as the renowned journalist Jean Daniel, editor of the magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur*, who were representing the "Aswan association for a dialogue between cultures and civilisations". Established in '89, this multinational group was sponsored by the Afro-Asian Writers' Association and held its first meeting in November '90, on a Nile cruiser in Aswan.

Two Egyptian-born French writers, Bahgat El-Nadi and Adel Rifaat, the editors-in-chief of the UNESCO publication *Courier*, took part in the founding of the group, I, together with Rushdi Said, Tarek Ali Hassan, Mursi Saad El-Din, Mona Makram Ebaid, Mohamed Ouda, Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, Soheir Fahmy and the late Philip Galaburda participated in the organisation's activities.

The sum and substance of the discussions and activities of the Aswan group revolved around the mobilisation of the best brains and creative energies of our contemporary world so that it would move in line with changes in the international arena and their political, economic, social and intellectual dimensions.

A most important aspect of the Aswan group's actions was asserting the moral authority of intellectuals. Indeed, the Aswan group aims at empowering intellectuals to face up to the 21st century and become something of a counterbalance to the traditional political, military and economic powers that be.

The Aswan group, in conjunction with the Afro-Asian Writers' Association, UNESCO, the World Media Group and other international cultural organisations, convened its very first conference in Cairo in 1991. It was called the International Conference for Thought and Creativity. A second conference in New Delhi was convened in December 1992 in conjunction with the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. The Delhi meeting focused on the various new religious and political phenomena in a changing world. The Paris 1994 seminar focused on the future of development.

The Aswan group established close contact with three presidents — François Mitterrand, Mikhail Gorbachev and Hosni Mubarak — who respectively represented the capitalist West, the socialist East and the Third World and provided the association with much material and moral support and encouragement. The three presidents showed a keen interest in the Aswan group's activities.

At the Aswan seminar, François Mitterrand delivered the keynote address where he focused on human rights concerns and on social, economic and cultural development.

At the Paris seminar, Mitterrand looked ill. Weighed down by his dreaded disease, he smiled softly and said in a calm voice, "Good idea: You could form an opposition group in response to those who put into people's minds the nightmare of a future clash of civilisations." He was quiet for a while, then said, "Where do you envisage the venue of the meeting: in Cairo, Alexandria or in Aswan? If you decide to convene it in Aswan, then I would do my utmost to attend." He instinctively put his hand on his chest, gently clasping his fingers — that was his habit. "How about 'What about culture'?" as a theme of the seminar?" he thought out loud. "Et la culture," he repeated again. It is imperative that the Third World issue brave and courageous answers to the question of culture. Mitterrand emphasised

Mitterrand had a rather soft spot for the Third World. Lutfi El-Kholi explains why and, through a long association with the man and his ideals, outlines the parameters of the late French president's world influence

Egypt's voice is much needed in this context, precisely because of the country's cultural weight.

The Third World, and especially the key countries that constitute the cradle of civilisations, was the focus of Mitterrand's attention and it aroused his passion. It was said that he pretended to be sympathetic to the Third World so as to appear to be more humane than his counterparts in other Western nations.

Others thought that he deliberately sought grandeur as a unique world leader. A critic once called him the "leader who throws kisses to the poor", while in reality he was nothing but a gang leader of the poor's vicious rich exploiters.

There are those who saw Mitterrand's interest in the Third World as a clever tactic to kill two birds with one stone: combating American hegemony and outmanoeuvring his socialist critics in France and throughout Europe who had long cast the shadow of doubt on his socialist credentials. "He was a capitalist emperor who loved to clothe himself in socialist garb," his leftist detractors used to say.

My personal appraisal of the man is that Mitterrand was indeed to the Third World — in a personal, intellectual and political fashion. With his espousal of Third World causes he was strong for the sins of his past; his role in attempting to thwart the Algerian revolution and other liberation struggles that raged on until the early 1960s. He had insisted that Algeria remain French. He opposed General Charles de Gaulle when the latter, upon being returned to power in 1958, embarked on a policy of making political contacts with the leaders of the Algerian revolution and gradually accepting the right of Algerians to national self-determination.

I had a discussion with Mitterrand in the Guinean capital, Conakry. He had been invited by the late President Ahmed Sekou Touré of Guinea. I was among a delegation representing Egypt's Arab Socialist Union and was participating in the congresses of 1963-64 of the then ruling Guinean Socialist Party. Mitterrand was in Guinea at the time accompanying the then French Prime Minister Mende-France. President Sekou Touré invited me to the presidential palace in Conakry where I met socialist leaders from Europe and Africa who were participating at the congress. Sekou Touré introduced me to Mende-France and Mitterrand saying, "You can tell them about moves towards the left in the Nasser regime." Sekou Touré told Mitterrand that as a leftist I had been recently released from Nasser's prisons and that there was a rapprochement between Nasser and the Egyptian left.

Sekou Touré was among the leading leftist pillars and a fine example for African revolutionaries of the time. Touré had visited Cairo and had met with some of the leftists released by Nasser. Some of them had participated in the launching of the opinion pages of Al-Ahram. Indeed, Mohamed Hasseine Heikal, former editor-in-chief of Al-Ahram, published these articles despite serious opposition within the regime.

Mende-France and Mitterrand were curious to learn about what they called the development which had happened to Nasser. They showed interest in my explanation of the 23 July movement in Egypt. De-

spite it being a military coup, it was really a nationalist movement — containing elements from the left and the right — against British occupation and the rule of the king and his allies, the big landowners.

After organising the Free Officers to take over power with support from popular movements, opposing political and social forces were attracted to the regime. The ensuing conflicts resulted in the far left and the far right, including the Muslim Brotherhood, losing out heavily to the bourgeois centre. However, facing the challenges of national independence and development, the regime later moved, intellectually and politically, to the left.

I remember Mohamed Habib explaining the extent of the aid that Egypt, under Nasser, gave to the Algerian liberation movement. Mitterrand surprised us by apologising for his former stance against the movement, and said that it was a result of the right-wing grooming he had received in the French resistance movement against Nazi occupation. He seemed sincere in his apology, although he still called for a French Algeria after moving to the left.

In a pained voice, Mitterrand said, "This is history and I have conclusively severed my links with it, intellectually, politically and emotionally." He paused for a moment before continuing: "It was a terrible mistake which I will not let myself repeat in any situation. I think that I and all of us in Europe must make amends for this mistake towards the peoples of the Third World."

When we began, with Heikal, on the opinion page of Al-Ahram and then in the magazine Al-Tali'a to invite the most prominent intellectuals and politicians in the world to be interviewed in Cairo, Mitterrand was at the top of the list along with Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Che Guevara, Maxime Rodinson, Bertrand Russell and others. Most of the interviews took place during Nasser's reign, but the interview with Mitterrand was postponed until 1973 since he had been preoccupied with establishing the new Socialist Party.

The issue which dominated Mitterrand's interview with Al-Ahram was the Palestinian problem and the future of Israel after its 1973 defeat. It seemed to us that the French Socialist Party and Mitterrand personally were sympathetic to Israel to the extent that they considered the PLO terrorists. Our side of the argument was that the PLO was leading the Palestinian people in the liberation of their homeland from Israeli occupation and that Yasser Arafat was a revolutionary leader, not a terrorist.

Mitterrand listened, questioned and presented numerous thoughts on the matter. It appeared as if he had acquainted himself for the first time with new information on the Palestinian problem and was showing his understanding of it. But the pivotal question for him remained: What was Israel's future in the reckoning of Egypt and the rest of the Arabs, especially the Palestinians and Yasser Arafat?

We suggested to meet the Palestinian leader. "How and when?" he asked. "Today over lunch, if you want," replied Heikal. After a momentary pause, Mitterrand said, "We are your guests. We do not see it as fitting that we should object to sitting at your ta-

blic with whomsoever you invite." So Mitterrand ate lunch beside Arafat in the Al-Ahram canteen.

When I was invited in 1980, with my colleague Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, to a Mediterranean basin conference in the suburbs of Marseilles, I was surprised to find that it was actually the opening of Mitterrand's election campaign. A meeting had been organised on the fringe of the conference between Arab and Israeli participants. The aim was to produce a joint Arab-Israeli statement calling for support to the Camp David accords and peaceful Arab-Israeli coexistence.

The Arabs decided to reject the invitation to attend. The Moroccan writer Tahar ben Jelloun was commissioned to relay the reasons for the decision to the conference secretary. Among the reasons he gave were that the Palestinians were not represented at the conference and that the Palestinian problem and the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination were ignored.

Mitterrand tried to talk us into taking part. He said that our refusal aroused misgivings inside him about the position of Arab progressives on the possibility of fair and peaceful political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. He surprised us by asking: "Are Arab leftists against the peaceful political settlement of the conflict?"

When we replied that the Arab left were for such a settlement, he retorted: "Why then are you against the Camp David agreements and the courageous option which President Sadat took?" We said that the agreements did not represent a comprehensive settlement and meant that the Palestinians had lost out.

Mitterrand argued that Sadat's choice was right in terms of principle. He had understood our reservations about the agreements, but felt the Arab left was wrong to continue to oppose Camp David without offering an alternative. He went on, saying, "You accuse the French left of being biased towards Israel against the Arabs. The Arabs and Palestinians have national rights which must be respected, but the Israelis also have the same rights."

Mitterrand then pointed towards me and said,

"You participated in our seminar at Al-Ahram and my conversation with Mr Yasser Arafat. I think you heard clearly this position from me, especially when I summarised our position at the conclusion of the seminar. Was that the case or not?"

I replied, "Yes, it was the case. But it was in 1973 and between the four walls of the seminar room. And that was it. Neither you nor the Socialist Party had crystallised your position publicly yet, and we have not done so in 1980."

Mitterrand paused an instant before saying, "Fine. The time has come to announce our position. Tonight at the popular rally [in Marseilles] you will discover our position. We needed time for study."

At the rally, when he was speaking about the Arab-Israeli conflict, Mitterrand spent a relatively long time talking about Israel's right to peaceful existence within secure borders. When he came to crystallise his position on the peaceful political settlement of the conflict, he slowed his speech down. He made the point that recognition of this legitimate Israeli right should be met with recognition of the Palestinians' legitimate right to have a state on its own territory.

It was a surprise to everyone. But the biggest surprise was the response of the French crowd, which applauded Mitterrand warmly for over two minutes. This position, the first of its kind in the West, remained Mitterrand's firm position until his death.

The sound of silence

By
Mohamed
Abdel-Moneim

Among his many epithets, President Mitterrand was dubbed by his people the "Silent Power". The late French president, who had a special fascination for ancient Egypt, was sparing with his words. He was one of a kind of men who appear at certain points in history to introduce new meanings to life and induce radical changes.

Mitterrand left an indelible mark on France which will be felt for many years after his death. His rule was a turning point in the history of his country, marking the end of an epoch and the beginning of another, in terms of domestic reforms. The shaping of Europe has been and will remain deeply influenced by his ideas and the causes he was committed to.

Despite the traditional enmity between France and Germany and the sad memories of two brutal wars, a tearful Helmut Kohl was seen at the funeral. Germany's chancellor, who also had designs and ideas for what Europe should be like, was grieving the death of President Mitterrand, and such genuine human sentiments caught the attention of the public.

The 20th century has been replete with situations which seemed to be glaringly paradoxical. After the years of hostility during the first half of the century, it was as hard to believe the chancellor's grief as it was to comprehend the tears shed by Arab leaders at the funeral of Prime Minister Rafik. It was only a few years ago that Arab leaders and Israel were engaged in a series of brutal wars.

Mitterrand's friendship with Mubarak — and with Egypt — began when Mubarak was vice-president. The fact that Mitterrand's own brother was an air force commander — like Mubarak — only served to strengthen their friendship. The bond between the two leaders grew over time and reflected positively on the relationship between their two peoples.

Mitterrand's fascination with Egyptian history only reinforced those ties. He frequently visited Upper Egypt. While French bread is world famous, during such visits Mitterrand liked to eat Egyptian *baladi* bread, baked in the homes of poor peasants in remote villages lining the Nile valley.

Small wonder that the Silent Power, who had a hand in shaping the destiny of post-War Europe, left forever his beloved Egypt only a few days before his passing. In the jet airplane on his return journey, the Silent Power, so richly endowed with political acumen and a passion for life, decided to discard his medicines once and for all, thus silencing forever that zest for life.

The writer is the managing editor of Al-Ahram.

Primakov versus Pervomaiskaya

As hundreds of Russian troops began moving early last Sunday in a bid to free hostages being held by Chechen separatists, Primakov was appointed foreign minister, writes **Abdel-Malek Khalil** from Moscow

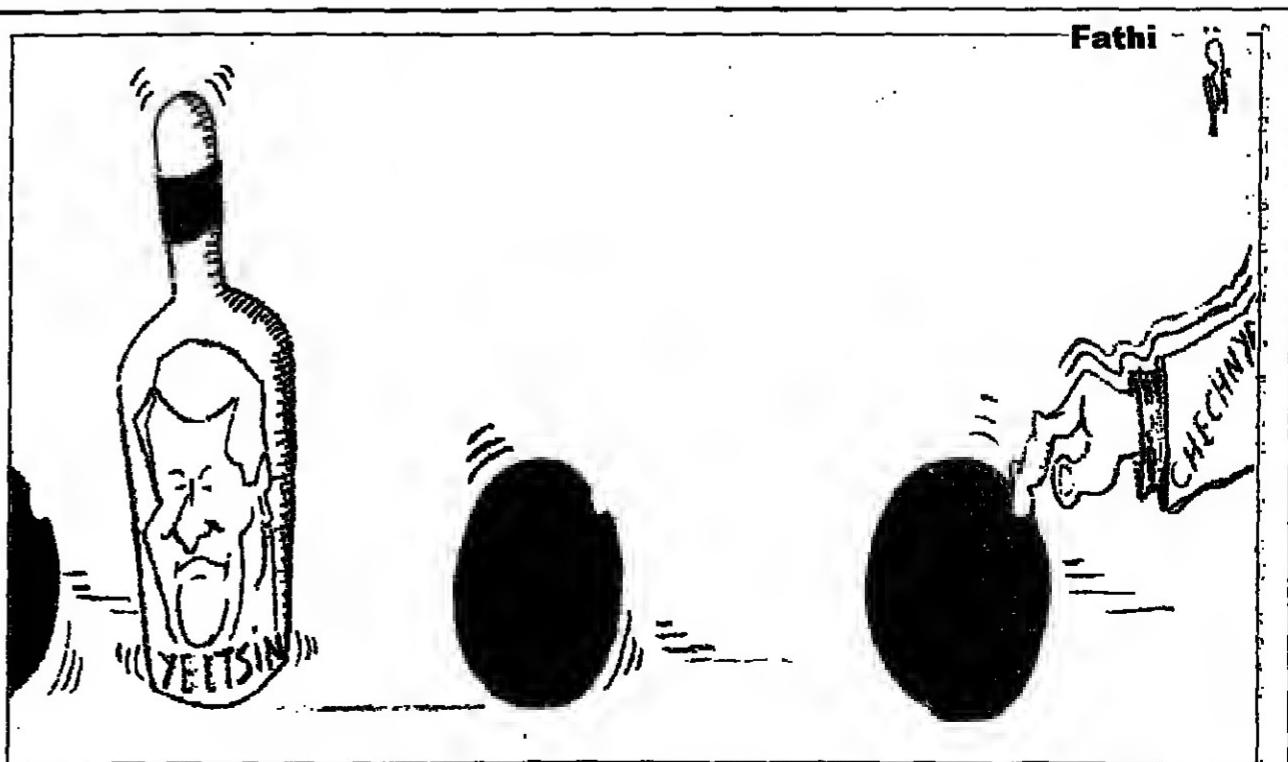
Russian President Boris Yeltsin's appointment last week of Yevgeny Maximovich Primakov as his foreign minister lures to the post an Arabist and Orientalist who is fluent in English and Georgian in addition to Russian. Primakov has a clear vision of the Arab world's significant place in Russian foreign policy concerns. He is a survivor in Russia's Byzantine politics.

But why did Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin select Primakov for the job? Primakov is very different from his predecessor Andrei Kozyrev, an old timer, who was regarded as a close associate of Yeltsin. Kozyrev used to resort to Yeltsin for advice whenever he was faced with a problem, which was actually the domain of Chernomyrdin.

Meanwhile, Kozyrev was regarded as too pro-Western for Russia's independent international image. But Primakov emphasised that one of the priorities of the new government was to tip the balance in Russia's favour as far as its relations with the United States and Europe were concerned. He stressed that Russia had to be treated as a superpower and that he would visit the capitals of all the former Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in the near future.

However, Primakov said that there was no turning back as far as the independence of the CIS was concerned. On 19 January,

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Five years on

It is five years to the day since the launch of Desert Storm, the operation to free Kuwait from its Iraqi invaders that turned into a rehearsal of the latest generation of the most up to date weaponry, and which occasioned a great deal of blood to be spilt in the sands of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. It is the fifth anniversary, then, of the total collapse of the Arab order. Five years have elapsed since the remaining dreams of Arab unity were shattered.

Yet despite repeated American forecasts to the contrary the last five years have passed without the slightest sign that Saddam Hussein's regime has lost its grip on power. Saddam's success in maintaining his rule has proved, if proof were necessary, that he is stronger than the attempts to mobilise Iraqi opposition forces. He was, quite clearly, in a position to weather the placing of northern Iraq under Western protection. And attempts to encourage the Kurds to secede have failed as miserably as King Hussein's designs for a federal system in Iraq. Not only has Saddam survived these numerous attempts to undermine his regime, he appears to have done so without his grip on power being noticeably weakened.

In the Arab world the conviction is growing that the sanctions that Iraq faces have miserably failed to shake Saddam's power base. If anything they have acted to strengthen Saddam's position in Iraq while at the same time forcing ordinary Iraqis into ever more wretched conditions. And there is a growing feeling that the present situation, if it is allowed to continue, will result only in further deterioration on the Arab front.

Yet Arab initiatives to promote conciliation invariably run foul of imaginary obstacles, conjured by those who have a vested interest in seeing the current situation perpetuated. It is, after all, a very profitable business selling protection to the Arab world. A colossal quantity of arms, sold for incredible amounts of money, regularly end their way into the region.

With the end of Desert Storm, and following the crushing of the Iraqi army, the UN Security Council, under constant American pressure, has concentrated on forcing Iraq to destroy its nuclear capability, its missiles and chemical weapons, all under international supervision. But this is only one side of the coin. The reverse is the massive build up of American weapons and supplies in the Arabian Gulf, sold by the US at a vast profit with the avowed aim of allowing the Gulf states to beef up their defensive capabilities in the face of foreign threats and potential menaces.

The Gulf has become the site of a massive arms race. The US, Britain and France compete with each other in their attempts to persuade Gulf states to purchase ever greater quantities of weapons, despite the budgetary problems these states are incurring in "defending" themselves.

It seems that hardly a week passes without the arrival in the Gulf of some American, French or British minister, chief-of-defence staff or arms merchant, hell-bent on off-loading yet more arms.

The question now is just how much longer can the arms exporting nations continue to exploit conditions in the Gulf for the sake of their own profits. How long will it be before the Arabs attempt to rectify the situation and begin to sound out the possibility of a comprehensive Arab reconciliation. Five years in the life of the region is not an insignificant period.

Gomaa's

**Elections, institutions, democracy**

Edward Said, while welcoming the idea of elections in Palestine, remains equivocal about their conduct on the ground given the absence of credible guarantees

I am extraordinarily glad that Samia Khalil is running against Yasser Arafat in the upcoming Palestinian elections. A separate election is to be held for the position of *ra'i*. (Among its many ungenerous provisions, the Taba treaty doesn't allow the word president; only the ambiguous Arabic word for chairman and president is allowed). She is Arafat's only competitor, a tough, smart, energetic woman who has openly espoused the cause of the majority of Palestinians, those whose voices have not been heard, and who have been forgotten in the vulgar celebrations over "self rule": women, and children, the dispossessed, prisoners, and all those whose lives have become worse as a result of the peace-process.

She seems particularly interested in righting the wrongs of the interim agreement which, she said with admirable clarity to the British journalist Graham Usher, "do not provide a just solution to the Palestinian question. The Israelis are still expropriating our lands... forcing us to live in isolated cantons. The so-called by-pass routes are separating one Palestinian area from another. Students in Gaza cannot travel freely to their universities in Beirzeit, Hebron, Bethlehem and Jerusalem. The prisoners are still in jail despite promises from the Israelis that they are going to be released. For these reasons, I am standing for election." When asked how her programme differed from that of Yasser Arafat, she responded with cool irony: "I am unaware of Chairman Arafat's programme." This is perfectly true, since Arafat is running without any real programme, in order simply to be confirmed as the head of everything.

Yet just because she has spoken out against autocracy and occupation — in both of which of course the Palestinian Authority has already acquiesced — Ms Khalil has opened a small window in the elections. Arafat will surely win, although thanks to his opponent's courage he cannot get 99.6 per cent of the votes; he will, of course, gain a sizable majority and thus will allow him to say that he now represents all Palestinians democratically. This is pure nonsense. The election law agreed upon with the Israelis suits him and them: it is by no means an instance of real democracy, however. Through a joint Israeli-Palestinian Liaison Committee (controlled by the Israelis who have veto power) every voter is registered according to his or her Israeli identification number; this also means that every voter has been cleared by the Israelis. Every candidate of the 700 now running for the Legislative Council

must also be approved by Israel. No racists, terrorists or opponents of the peace process are allowed to run; on the other hand, Israel is not reciprocally obliged to exclude Israelis who hold racist or anti-peace views from running in Knesset elections. It is the Israelis and Yasser Arafat who alone and unilaterally can decide who is excluded, who is included.

On 1 January Eric Lidbom, chair of the Electoral Unit of the European Union issued a statement from Ramallah entitled "Enough is Enough". In it he accused the Authority (in effect Mr Arafat) of tampering with the elections so as to undermine their credibility internationally as well as domestically. Arafat increased the number of candidates from 8 to 88 (most of them from Gaza, whose population did not suddenly increase). He shortened the three-week campaign period by almost two weeks, then suddenly restored it. He did not name the supposedly independent Central Electoral Commission until late in December. The group was supposed to be appointed three months ago to take charge of regulating the elections, making sure that fairness prevailed, looking into complaints about abuses and infractions. It was also supposed to be composed of distinguished jurists and, more importantly, well-known independents, men and women whose credentials were above party or commercial interests. Not only did Arafat name the Commission several weeks late, but he put at its head Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas), his second-in-command, a man with no known experience in law or elections or impartiality. No complaints have been dealt with. Almost without exception the members of the Committee are either employees or have some direct connection with the Palestinian Authority. This is hardly a guarantee of fairness.

To make matters worse Abu Mazen refused to meet with the European Unit. Abu Mazen's unavailability made it impossible for Lidbom's people to find out more about all the irregularities whose purpose, it is obvious, was to give Arafat more control over the results of the elections. It is worth quoting the European Unit directly:

"At such a meeting [had Mr Abbas made it possible] Mr Lidbom would have listened with interest to an explanation of why the Central Election Commission was not set up much earlier and why none of

along with this is a sad commentary on Palestinian ideas of independence and free speech.

But the worst thing, which the elections will not help, is that economically the condition of most Palestinians (especially in Gaza) has deteriorated steadily since Oslo. Twenty per cent of the population there lives below the poverty line (about \$650 per capita per year); Sara Roy, the American researcher who knows more about Gaza's economy than anyone else, says that 33 per cent of the Palestinian poor were forced into poverty after the Oslo accord was finalised. Unemployment is still over 50 per cent and Roy says the number of poor exceeds by 74 per cent the number now being helped by the Authority's Ministry of Social Affairs and UNRWA. Each Gaza family now spends 58 per cent of its income on food, and the overall Gaza economy loses \$3 million a day because of Israeli strictures.

One of the main reasons for so terrible an economic deterioration is the sheer cost of Arafat's rule through his police force, plus his seven, eight, or nine security apparatuses (no one is quite sure how many he has established for himself) and his over 4,000 secret agents throughout the West Bank and Gaza who spy on the population. Raji Sourani, the Gaza human rights lawyer who was imprisoned by Arafat last year, estimates that there are now 20,000 security men for one million residents of Gaza; at one police station per 50 people this is the highest police per capita ratio in the world. The total number of police throughout the self-rule areas is close to 30,000, which costs the Palestinian economy about \$500 million a year. This is a totally unproductive, albeit by far the largest economic sector, which is already \$150 million dollars in debt. Because Arafat spends so much money on police, he has nothing left to spend on housing, education, health, and welfare. It is difficult to imagine how the Palestinian elections can change this situation, since Arafat and his candidates are running on a purely "Palestinian" platform that simply does not address the basic control of the self-rule areas by Arafat. He would like to go on doing so after the elections, and of course will claim that he has "the people's" support for what he does. In effect, however, he will be fulfilling Israel's programme for keeping or-

der — and Israel's security — in the Occupied Territories.

Nevertheless, the idea of elections introduces something new in Palestinian life. I think we should remember first of all that the Arab and Third Worlds are full of elections that have consolidated more undemocratic regimes than one should care to mention; even so, this does not invalidate the idea of elections, which at least promises the likelihood and even desirability of democratic change. The problem with elections in Palestine and the Arab world now is that they have the status of a ritual that takes place once in a while, without any record of democratic change as a result of elections. How many rulers or ruling parties have been seriously affected by elections? Most institutions in our societies operate like immense, glacial-like structures, with one person (or a small group) more or less permanently in charge; this is why our universities are sub-standard and why no important work of real consequence has emerged from them to the social and natural sciences. Scientific and humanistic research require a relatively open environment in which to flourish, an environment in which researchers can say things without fear that doing so might endanger their lives or jobs.

Second, for elections to work they must be part of a continuing dynamic in which the government is entirely accountable to citizens who have the right to vote and thereby directly affect the government's performance. For this we need a functioning civil society, with trade and professional associations, an independent judiciary, a relatively free press, and a well-endowed education system. None of these of course exist in Palestine today, and it is one of the greatest drawbacks in Mr Arafat's style of authority that he neither has the capacity nor the vision to understand that Palestine must aspire to be a society, not simply a reflection of his personal will.

I wish I could participate in the upcoming elections, if only to vote for Samia Khalil and her programme of social and economic change. But being unable to do so, I can at least hope that the idea of elections at the very least promises the possibility of change. And this idea is going to make things slightly harder for the present Palestinian Authority to go on exactly as before. Perhaps people will ask more questions, issue more challenges, demand more answers. But my real hope is that the elections might also make it slightly more difficult for Yasser Arafat and his trusted men to govern as they please, with no respect for the people they supposedly serve.

Multi-faceted and feasible

Taha Abdel-Alim argues that a more holistic view of development is required if comprehensive progress is ever to be achieved, and the absolutism of past models abandoned

Marxists in the Arab world, as elsewhere, have assumed that the theoretical model of a communist society (or a society that had its practical manifestation in a totalitarian socialist system) represented the optimum level of social advancement. They have maintained that the ideals of socialism, and then communism, might be attained through the Soviet — sometimes the Chinese — system in much the same way as liberals have argued that the theoretical model for a capitalist society, as exemplified by the experience of the US, represents the culmination of a process of historical evolution.

Following capitalism's defeat of communism — essentially a conceptual battle through one waged intensively on the ground during the Cold War — liberals have enjoyed a virtual monopoly. Despite the fact that progress is an historical concept, evolving over time and differing between one society and another there remains the illusion, propagated by liberals and Marxists alike, that there is an end to progress and that this end can be recognised through a fixed set of criteria that remain constant for all societies.

If socialist concepts in their various manifestations emanated from a defence of the value of social justice and capitalist concepts from the defence of the value of individual liberty, the insistence on the essential nature of these values nonetheless became bound up with philosophies that attempted to structure economic, political and cultural values. Hence the emergence of a third contingent — the nationalists — able to mesh together elements drawn from the world views of both socialists and liberals, within a framework of national cultural identity which proposes an ideal nation as the ultimate goal of progress. Unfortunately, such proposals have all too often come to incorporate the abrogation of the rights of ethnic minorities and the repudiation of the inevitability of coexistence. And then there is a fourth

group, the religious fundamentalists, whose perception of progress is founded upon applying scripture in strict accordance with a rigid, though nonetheless idiosyncratic, reading of revealed texts.

Progress is a process that aims to realise the ultimate intent of a set of common human values that at once embody what is common to all human communities and what is particular to a specific community. I would posit that the core set of values for comprehensive development, after reformulating and refining them, can be summarised as follows — economic sufficiency, social justice, democratic development, national security and cultural identity.

Such a list eliminates the erroneous view that progress is an unfocused monolith, that it can be achieved through the promotion of one of its facets at the expense of others. Historically and theoretically the logic of progress has consistently demonstrated two essential phenomena. Firstly, there exists a mutual causal relationship between the various facets of comprehensive progress, whereby each is simultaneously the cause and the effect of the other. Secondly, there is a pressing need to determine the salient or controlling factors that will hasten the process.

Any comprehensive vision of progress must stem from realistic postulates, practical requirements and sensible principles. Only then will it be possible to implement policies and programmes that incur minimum costs while maximising rewards in the shortest possible time.

Ready-made prescriptions suited to all societies are an illusion. This is not to say, however, that comprehensive progress cannot be achieved within the framework of a general logic that includes economic development, higher productivity and increased competitiveness. These are the necessary prerequisites if we

are to ever get beyond what has been aptly termed "sozialismus in the distribution of poverty."

Economic and human development represent, too, the cornerstone of any developing democracy. They are the only guarantee of the sovereignty of law and the peaceful rotation of authority. In the absence of such development it has proved impossible to create the necessary conditions that would guarantee national security at its local, regional and international levels.

The end of the Cold War clearly demonstrated that differentiated levels of progress in comprehensive development constituted a grave threat to the security of both first and third world nations. It has also demonstrated that economic progress based on the latest accomplishments of the technological industrial revolution has become the mainstay for comprehensive progress.

Here again, however, the controversial, relative and obscure nature of the concept of progress rears its head. Defining the criteria by which progress is to be measured has become an imperative for all societies, since we cannot rush headlong towards progress before its components have been defined.

If a society does not engage in this defining process it is in danger of incurring unnecessary costs, both social and material, that will compound the problems that already have accrued from unequal levels of development.

Yet the already complex process of defining progress as a set of commonly shared human values is further complicated by the need to constantly revise and reformulate our definitions in the light of the changing international order which has ramifications for all regional and international systems. Defining a set of values, then, entails a dialectic synthesis, proceeding from the specific to the general and from the surface to

the substance, based on an objective analysis of the process of human development throughout the course of history.

While any society in the process of reformulating its set of values of progress will encounter the dilemma of the dialectic between the universal and the specific, it faces, too, the conundrum of constants versus variables and deterministic factors versus corollary factors. And once again, the uncertainty generated during a period of rapid change and transition on the international level acts only to compound the difficulties.

The task, though, is not impossible. While rigid notions of socialist Marxism have collapsed, the ideal of social justice remains constant. While ready-made prescriptions espoused by Western liberalism have proved ineffectual, the market economy has clearly emerged victorious. Religious fundamentalism has bred despite regimes and terrorist movements, but the tolerance and beneficence inherent in religious principles remain eternal. Nationalism has given rise to savage ethnic strife, although cultural identity and national and ethnic affiliation are not necessarily antithetical to the principle of a common fate for all mankind.

Earlier misperceptions of progress have their roots in the adherence to a rigid, one-sided view of the set of universal values, and the promotion of a single value or aspect of that value in the detriment of the whole. Although one can sometimes understand the objective and psychological causes that motivate such a blinkered view, the exigencies of current realities demand a broader vision if a viable concept for progress is to be formulated.

The writer is deputy director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies and the editor of the centre's monthly, Strategic Papers.

Soapbox**Civil resolution**

Radical ideologies tend to flourish in times of crises, a result of the yearning for simple, decisive solutions to seemingly intractable problems, and though they are often crisp and elegant, they are seldom sophisticated. Their adherents usually have tunnel vision. True believers, with time their ideology becomes a faith. And of all radical ideologies, religious ones are the most dangerous, since they claim the status of divine revelation, and to question them leads to charges of heresy.

In recent years we have seen the dangers such charges can incur, including the killing of Farag Foda and the attempted assassination of Naguib Mahfouz. Nor is radicalism confined to the Islamic religion. In November 1995 Yigal Amir, of the religious Jewish extremist movement Kach, executed what he considered a divine ruling from God.

The present and future can only unfold peacefully in a spirit of pluralism of religious, socio-political, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic tolerance and co-existence. And such a pluralist paradigm is encompassed by the term civil society, the exact opposite of both religious and temporal despotism.

Civil society implies the recognition, acceptance and celebration of diversity, whether of belief, interests, ideas, or political pursuits. It is predicated on regulating and resolving differences by peaceful means. In this sense civil society and genuine democracy are two sides of the same coin. Civil society has ample room, even for religious political parties, so long as they accept the rules of co-existence.

The recent rekindling of the century old debate between secularists and non-secularists seems to miss the new paradigms which transcend theocracy and secularism but which have room for people so long as they respect and tolerate the deep convictions of others.



This week's Soapbox speaker is professor of political sociology at the AUC and director of the Ion Khodouni Centre for Development Studies.

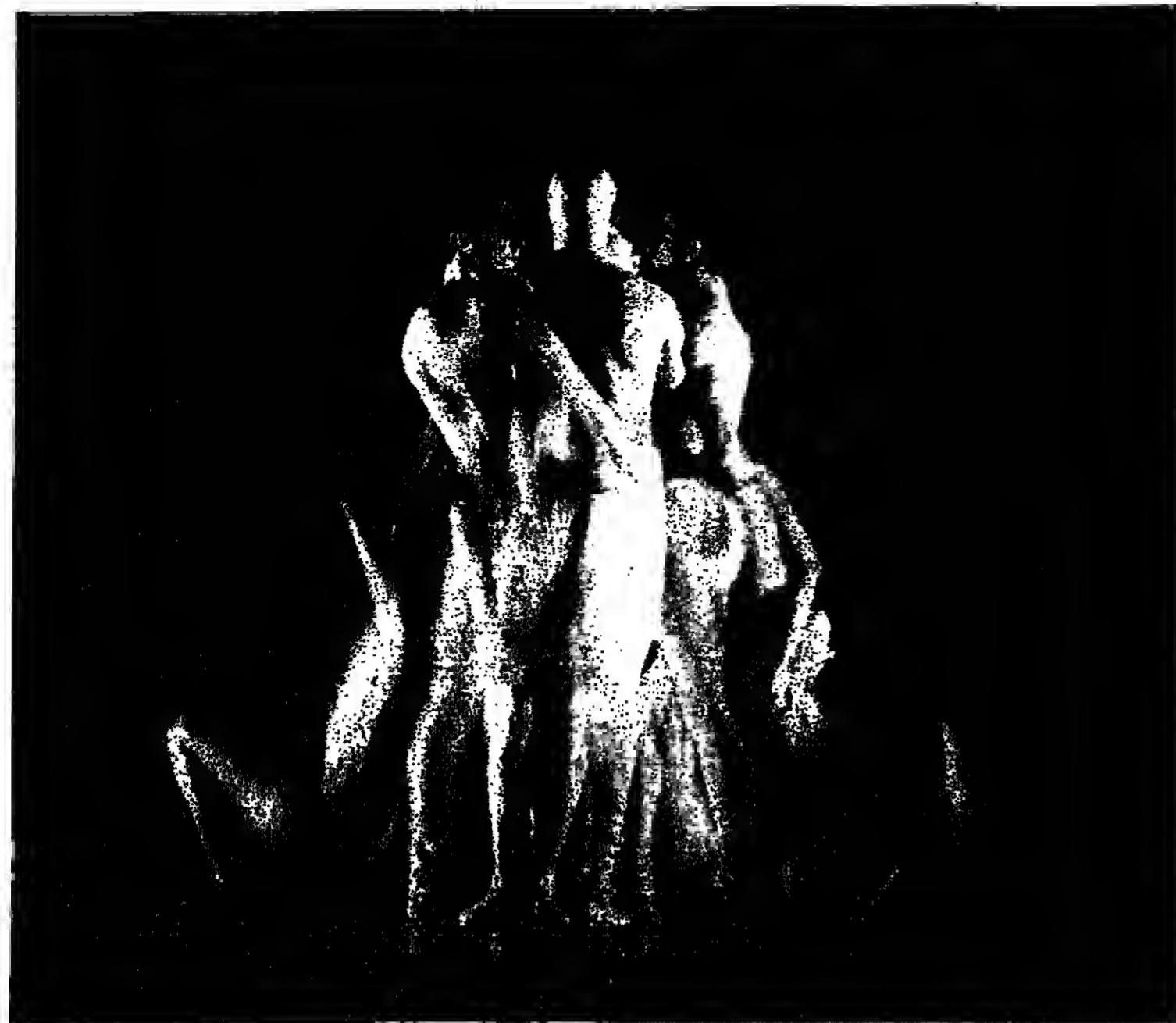
der — and Israel's security — in the Occupied Territories.

Nevertheless, the idea of elections introduces something new in Palestinian life. I think we should remember first of all that the Arab and Third Worlds are full of elections that have consolidated more undemocratic regimes than one should care to mention; even so, this does not invalidate the idea of elections, which at least promises the likelihood and even desirability of democratic change. The problem with elections in Palestine and the Arab world now is that they have the status of a ritual that takes place once in a while, without any record of democratic change as a result of elections. How many rulers or ruling parties have been seriously affected by elections? Most institutions in our societies operate like immense, glacial-like structures, with one person (or a small group) more or less permanently in charge; this is why our universities are sub-standard and why no important work of real consequence has emerged from them to the social and natural sciences. Scientific and humanistic research require a relatively open environment in which to flourish, an environment in which researchers can say things without fear that doing so might endanger their lives or jobs.

Second, for elections to work they must be part of a continuing dynamic in which the government is entirely accountable to citizens who have the right to vote and thereby directly affect the government's performance. For this we need a functioning civil society, with trade and professional associations, an independent judiciary, a relatively free press, and a well-endowed education system. None of these of course exist in Palestine today, and it is one of the greatest drawbacks in Mr Arafat's style of authority that he neither has the capacity nor the vision to understand that Palestine must aspire to be a society, not simply a reflection of his personal will.

I wish I could participate in the upcoming elections, if only to vote for Samia Khalil and her programme of social and economic change. But being unable to do so, I can at least hope that the idea of elections at the very least promises the possibility of change. And this idea is going to make things slightly harder for the present Palestinian Authority to go on exactly as before. Perhaps people will ask more questions, issue more challenges, demand more answers. But my real hope is that the elections might also make it slightly more difficult for Yasser Arafat and his trusted men to govern as they please, with no respect for the people they supposedly serve.

in Cairo



Sods and sables

Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo: Jean-Christophe Maillot, director-choreographer; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 9 January

If stress and strain afflict you and your daylight years have turned to stade, why not try *les Ballets de Monte Carlo*? Even if you know little about the ballet, the name Monte Carlo will ring some sort of bell in your ear, eye or mind. Stars and yachts, all afloat on the blue Med.

There is more to Monte Carlo than this. Its cultural lineage is first line, particularly when it comes to ballet. Waves of war and devastation have broken over its castle walls but Monte Carlo always survives to buy another yacht. It survives as a legend on its yesterdays which, with a bit of luck, could be our tomorrows.

The opening ballet defined the quality of the company — light or matter what. It is set to Mozart's lasciviously attractive music, the so-called *Jeune-homme piano concerto*. But Mozart is no one's background. Mire Jeune-homme and the music that has immortalised her becomes a ballet. The dancers follow its comet-like dazzle. Can anyone play the *Jeune-homme* on the piano? Its high manner almost defeats human effort. Wagner daeod to Beethoven. Only light particles could dance the *Jeune-homme*.

The Monte Carlo Ballet did a springy and glittery job with it. They are most beautiful to look at. They soar and frisk, float and dart from space to land and back again to the space in which they really belong. Their sinews quiver with strength and exactitude. Lagerfeld dressed them in white, pure classical tutus and tights with grey black boleros and jackets. They could be birds — they're lovely enough. They preen and there is malevolence in their regard. They have no voices — Mozart provides that — and no mercy. They offer themselves, which is enough. The beautiful do not live by men's laws and always run into trouble. These creatures are not icy but they offer no salvation to anyone but themselves. Why should they? They are securely under the protection of Mozart's own myth — music. It never abandons.

It is a very clever ballet. It understands the immense disturbances that lie beneath the terrestrial surface beauty of Mozart's music. It is useless to question him. Transcendental equivocation.

Art

Jannis Manganaris was born in Alexandria almost 80 years ago. For many years he was a member of the Alexandrian Greek community, though for several decades now he has been a resident of Greece. An exhibition of his paintings currently occupies Cairo-Berlin gallery. It will remain until 25 January, after which it will move to Alexandria.

The above is necessary information, since Manganaris' Egyptian origins appear to be the reason behind his exhibiting in Egypt, courtesy of the cultural section of the Greek Embassy. Which begs the question — is being a foreigner, born in Egypt, sufficient reason to be allocated gallery space?

The paintings on show are not, in themselves, very interesting. Figure studies all, they fragment the human form into a series of boulders, which sounds monumental but which

The cast of dancers seem born to dance their routines. They are rather an alarming lot. Each one entering seems more wonderful than the one who has just floated off. This cannot be. It is not on the programme of either dancer or choreographer, yet it goes on — upsetting and breathtaking, like the music.

Uwe Schobz has made an almost perfect ballet. She has made a physical thing — an appendage — that can follow along in the star trail blazed by Mozart. She creates, affixes, draws lines, suggests things, invades the abstract with the brilliant physical shug of the metaphysical. Her ballet is a perfectly balanced aphorism about poise, security and the terrors of existence which must be balanced and made supposable. It is a cry of pain crackling with wit and the courage of dandyism.

If only her ballet would not end. But it has to when the *Jeune-homme* races to its final equivocation. It was a joy to be given the opportunity to love it.

The piano (recorded) was played so well in the *Jeune-homme*, the race through its intricacies so perfectly judged, that a feeling of let-down was inevitable with the Hindemith. But the pace of the orchestra (again recorded) was more than enough to lift a composer who can easily sound dowdy and adrift in his own complexities.

The decor of the first ballet was not a decor but a subtly lit how-up of a photograph of one of the female Mozarts at the keyboard. The decor of Hindemith's *Theme and Variations* was a light-cube of stage-with-a-backdrop of four coloured strips, shades of lavender plus another three of oatmeal — which alternated and changed with the moods of the dance. The choreography was classical with a twist of now to it. Jean-Christophe Maillot gave the four variations — the four tempers — as a series of confrontations. The tempeaments were not very specifically marked out. Bach did it with notes. He left the bodies to fend for themselves.

The stage scene for the *Variations* was serial and spacious. Maillot has a genuine symphonic feeling and brought this work to a noble close.

The title of the last ballet was *Who Cares?* Well, we the audience did. After the other two, this was pallid and not up to the patterns of the music. Though the programme invokes the awe-inspiring name of Balanchine, this ballet lacks his drive and daring; maybe he got lost in Broadway traffic. There

was oozing wroog with the company: they seemed even more beautiful than in the first part of the performance. The boys wore black trousers and white shirts; the girls plain *West Side Story* skirts. The lady in yellow was a primal goddess. The boy was in all over Palermo black, up above the gang, among those everlasting towers of New York suggested by the decor. The music suggests a black presence, the *Star Dust Requiem*. The glitter has long gone and the towers look lonely, way up in the sky crooning *My Man*. The actual essence was missing and it was only the beauty of the lady in the orange dress that suggested and projected the sadness. The corn was missing from the cob.

Un Ballo in Maschera (Verdi): Cairo Opera Company; Cairo Opera Orchestra; Ivan Filev, conductor; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 3 and 4 January

The four horsemen of the Apocalypse, those night-haunting riders of the wind, visited Verdi often between *Nabucco* and *Otello*, with shattering stop-offs at *Ballo* and *La Forza del Destino*.

It is only fitting, therefore, that we should hail the visitations of *Ballo* to the Cairo Opera House with the respect that is its due. It fairlyhursts at the seams with genius.

It was almost a repertory piece here by chance and fate, a difficult, haunting opera that presents its endless challenge regardless. No matter that its parts lie in an area of sumptuous largesse which the company can barely sustain. It is there and the challenge is often accepted. So year by year the local forces are strengthening their suits on renewed efforts to come to terms with it. And such repetition is at last beginning to bring dividends.

Those who have not heard Solti unwrap the entire score of *Ballo* into a smoldering ball of fire and throw it at an audience before plumping it into the glittering depths of the king's murder cannot begin to imagine the breadth of the emotional explosion. But even in this modest production there were explosions of sorts. Filev, though slow in the beginning, gained ground and moved fast. He drove it on mercilessly. Hard for the singers. No matter, they are there to produce excitement and great gestures. Opera is made of often fatal leaps. If the jump fails, stick to it.

The audience followed suit? Verdi goes well into 2001. Black velvet, delicious corruption, poisoned champagne. It must be up-scaled a bit with great dames drowsing by Ricardo's fire. And what have we for dinner? Amelia, his wife.

Ballo will go on forever. Will the audience follow suit? Verdi goes well into 2001. Black velvet, delicious corruption, poisoned champagne. It must be up-scaled a bit with great dames drowsing by Ricardo's fire. And what have we for dinner? Amelia, his wife.

A grey day

Stones, stones, stones. Nigel Ryan steps between the boulders

not. The female form becomes an assemblage of broken colossi, a kind of reconstructed Ozymandias bunched in vague landscapes or sprawling on the beach. But Ozymandias is not what he once was. Occasionally there is a carapace added, so we get woman as tortoise.

The paint is applied thinly, beige on beige or brown when it comes to the figures, and in pale, saffron-violet and pinks when it comes to the background. The only counterpoint to this washed out landscape — the figures occupying these landscapes are clearly intended to function as part of the general vista — are occasional bits of vegetation, placed next to or on the reclining nude. Thus, we have a colossus with an apple in her lap, with a lily, placed by several eggs. The

oude at one point courses a large fish — it too is pink and violet, and another piece of Christian symbolism. There is consistency here, but it is consistency striving after what?

The paintings form an obvious series. Indeed, there are far more of them than the gallery's limited space can accommodate, and several have been stacked against the wall. That this is no real loss is due to the paintings being more or less interchangeable, the one exception being a portrait of Cava, another Greek Alexandrian. They are all flat, cleverly foreshortened to give an illusion of depth which is consistently and deliberately undermined.

That the series should lack any cumulative effect is less a failure of ambition than of ex-

ecution. There is, unfortunately, little real content, despite the occasional feeling of compression, of stony silence waiting to burst beyond the thin gold frames. There is a hint of eroticism, though it is an evocative pantomime — nature is, after all, fecund — that can hardly justify so many images. It is contrived, and the thinness, the lack of conviction in the application of paint, the narrowness of the colour range, the triteness of the symbols — within such a context, there are few things that could be more banal than an apple, a lily and a crucifix juxtaposed — eventually add up to nothing. Pantheistic, and with hints of the surreal, betraying muted overtones in pastel shades.

Desultory and, despite the obvious allusions to regeneration, rather sad. It is a grey day, the kind of day on which even colossi should stay at home.

Around the galleries



Aida Abdel-Karim

WORTH looking out for at the Arts Centre, Zamalek — where the 24th General Exhibition continues — are psychologically and socially nuanced portraits by Sabri Raghib, and residually figurative sculptures in various materials by Mohamed Haqqi.

The Cairo Opera House Round Gallery hosts glass works by Zakaria El-Khamas and ceramic wall hangings by Aida Abdel-Karim. El-Khamas' glass sculptures and vessels exhibit a mastery of the media both in terms of colour manipulation and form while Abdel-Karim's wall hangings — inspired by geological and natural forms — harmoniously combine different genres.

Eight artists exhibit their landscape and cityscape paintings at the Egyptian Centre for International Cultural Cooperation. Worth noting are dreamlike landscapes in a variety of media by Mona Fouad, calm seascapes by Mostafa Mortas and bright urban vistas of domes and minarets by Wissam Fahmy.

Reviewed by Nagwa El-Ashry

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Yousra Mansourieh
Cairo-Pyramids, 9 Mohamed Al-Gohali St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagib (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Moustak Museum
Tahrir St, Giza. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1pm.
A permanent collection of work by the sculptor Mahmoud Moustak (d 1954), whose granite monoliths in the Zayed stands near Qasr Al-Nil Bridge.

Abdel-Mawad (Paintings)
Espace Gallery, 1 Al-Sherifia St, Downtown. Tel 593 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-5pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 18 Jan.

Exhibition of paintings by Alexander-Greek artist.

Hassan Ali Ahmed (Paintings)
Safra Art Center, 1 Al-Sherifia St, Downtown. Tel 593 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-5pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 18 Jan.

Abdel-Mawad (Paintings)
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The unfinished dance

By Edwar El-Kharrat

Last week's announcement that Edwar El-Kharrat is to receive one of the region's most prestigious literary awards, the Uwais award for fiction, valued at \$100,000, marks the belated acceptance of his singular and for long overlooked contribution to Arab fiction. El-Kharrat will travel to the Emirates in March, the month he turns 70, to receive the prize. Below, we publish a translation of the opening pages of *Yaqin Al-Atash* (Certainty of Thirst), his soon to be published novel

His sense of irreparable loss was profound. He said: Life has passed.

From the early seventies there suddenly came back to him the smell of the old Volkswagen, a smell that carried stirrings of fresh milk, of semen, of petrol, and of La Femina perfume which he knew from Rama.

He said: The smell of fertility, the smell of dynamism; a smell that will never return.

He said: So be it. It will never return. What is it that ever returns?

Of what import is it all?

She was the one driving the Volkswagen, as usual, now steering it up the broad asphalt mound. They had just left the Mens House with all its dilapidated historical opulence, its decadence bearing an aged elegance and the haughtiness of the last years of the nineteenth century. The dazzling moonlight, painful in its merciless brightness, startled them.

They had had a drink on the spacious terrace, empty at night. Beyond the dome, striped in brown and beige after the architectural fashion of mosques, loomed the old staircase. And he knew the stab of love and the rapture of making love in an upstairs side room whose wide window gives onto an undulant desert and from which he could see the broken apex of the Great Pyramid beneath a dark blue sky.

Rama stopped the car, slightly off the asphalt road, on a level spot of clean, hard white sand. Her tanned feet in the small shoes, the tender rich leather pressing them and bringing out a seductive softness as she walks slowly on the sand, the short wide skirt undulating over her broad hips.

He said: I check the flood of yearning and love, I dam up its vehement waves that threaten to destroy everything if I give vent to them.

He said: If I bury them in the quickands of my inner self, would they die? Or would their life take on a greater ferocity?

When he stood beneath the massive structure — the moonlight on the angles of the firm stones — and looked up, he saw that the sky itself had become a stone among those millennial stones which time had stripped of all embellishment, giving them that white-grey colour which was the colour of the sky itself this night, the colour of his inner self in its longing for the pent up womanhood at his side with all the intensity and suppressed tenderness enfolded.

The massive stones have lost their edges between the radiant light and the alants of pale shadow. It is as if they have dissolved, even as they remain solid. Are the stones of the sky smooth, never shaken by anything?

The stone of love is weighty, its darkness luminous.

Past midnight. In those days there were no guards, no policemen, not even those donkey drivers, camel drivers and horse drivers who spoil your mood with their constant harassment — "One pound, master. One livre, monsieur." The eternal desert was pure, as if it belonged to them; as if it was a benefaction that cannot be refused, and yet to accept it would be beyond endurance.

The ground beneath them was rocky and sprinkled with little granite pebbles, small or big, sharp of edge or hewn and softened by the years. They found a spot of fine sand — an island outside time, in the midst of the shards of time — and he felt the warmth of the sand under his feet.

Without a word, without preliminaries: what was happening before his eyes was unbelievable, vested at once with the power of the dream and its lightness — indisputable, and undeniable.

She was not speaking, which was unusual for her. She was silent.

She had said to him: I have a problem with you. You do not speak, do not say, do not give voice to what preoccupies you. So a rupture occurs, and tension and failure ensue, and you persist in not saying. So you remain for a long while until you let go, and speak. And as you see, everything is resolved, and things appear normal, simple, free of complication, with nothing secret or hidden behind them.

But as for her now, she was silent.

And there was no rupture.

She said to him: Would you like to see me in every one of my dresses?

He said eagerly: Yes, yes.

She had opened her cupboard, with its many mirrors whose reflected sections gleamed and reflected a thousand images of their bodies. And he saw her treasure of dresses. Hanging crammed, they were all elegant, expensive and in excellent taste. She placed her few clothes among her dresses, together with his shirts, one of which he had forgotten at her place when he went away. He had said: That I may return and take it; this is a good omen. But he never returned; nothing ever returned.

Rama first took off her shoes, as she always does before plunging into bed, before making love, removed the light blouse, unfastened the beige bra hug-

ging her breasts and stepped out of the skirt with one plump and shapely leg, then followed it swiftly with the other. She bent quickly and suddenly there was her body, resplendent, soft and ample under the moonlight, and there she was swaying with slow-flowing movements, as if not on this earth. Her rounded arms were raised to the moonstone which appeared as if descending to her. The big disc, tinged with an intoxicating deep red, seemed to respond to her invocation, while her breasts quivered to a gentle rhythm, dissolving his body, and there was nothing left of the world any longer.

Her round face, the colour of wheat, was turned upwards. Her

jet-black Indian hair, jet loose, cascaded down her proud, soft back, as if exuding spicy, humung and intoxicating whiffs, and how often had he in

hailed them in his feverish desire.

It is as if her face has become two eyes: big and wide, their green ripples, in the milky moon, beaming at his heart like the waves of a boundless, bottomless sea.

He said to her: Do you remember how you used to go out at night? I saw you crossing Abu Al-Ela Bridge, alone in your old Volkswagen. Rama, what were you looking for? Whom were you seeking?

She said to him, in a slightly stern, deliberate tone: No, I do not remember.

The sharply outlined hawk danced with her, as did the snakes, poised in geometrical coils, repetitive and stylised: the ibis birds, wings outstretched, sail to the mid-stream of an unseen Nile, their tails white; bows like the sand dunes whose patterned curves the acrobats cannot alter; and there was no triteness at all in these hieroglyphic movements:

He said: Here is her body with all its firmness and softness, returning to me in this vision at the brink of the sky — languid and taut, rigid and pliant, flowing as if forever constant.

Your body: Maat's feather, balancing the scales of body and of soul.

Flesh of pink granite: a sacred temple — defiled, inviolable and safeguarded, it stands facing the sun at sunrise, and is never overtaken by sunset.

The live scars team within the folds of the mystery kneaded with quenchless desire.

He said: Your rich, fecund presence still infuses my life. Your soft face I still feel under my lips. The treasures of your body which manifest themselves to me under this harsh light, I yet grasp in my hands and caress. In my eyes the radiance of your being in itself suffices.

He said: How dry are my words, even when I am silent, when I recall the glow of your body in my embrace, the warmth of your look.

Recall?

And can I forget?

Is the blooming lotus flower to her eyes or in the illusory moonlight?

The sarcophagi of the ancient kings are inhabited and flourishing. Death holds no sway over your body. Your breasts defy annihilation in the heart of the fecund inundation which no longer arrives. Does your dance, Isis of these times, set free the captive Nile?

The gleam of the old torches flickers over the curves of the soft desert body and the lush, verdant mounds. Daughters of Khensu-Bashans — pursuer of demons is he, or their refuge and haven? You, Rama, whose steadfast journey crosses the night, its course unalterable.

She said to him: Darling, I am happy you have come. Happily above all, that you exist and that I met you.

Then she moved away from him in the rhythm of her winged dance. It was then that he heard her murmur: Khensu, am I not your impulsive slave-girl or the lady of your glories?

The heavy gates opened, letting out the hawk with its huge wings, golden feathers glistening and quivering in the gust of the breeze of the luminous night. It flew far away, piercing the sky which he had imagined blocked. Rama climbed up the massive stones of the pyramid, her tender feet barely touching their white roughness, and penetrated into the breach which the men of Caliph Al-Mamoun had wrought.

The candles were alight, their flames small but unwavering on either side of that arduous passage which seemed to widen for the solo ballet she wove, treading its varied measures: tranquil and vibrant, and always joyous. Did Rama's dance lead her to the royal chamber?

He said that she never returned.

He said that the dance remained unfinished.

He said that he had waited for her all night long; and the night is not yet over; the night is dark and moonless.

He said that he was dying; that he was thirsty; that his thirst would never be quenched.

Illustration: Gamal Shafiq

Translated by Hala Halim

Plain Talk

In his book *Information and the Arab Cause* Abdel-Qader Hatem addresses the dedication "to seekers after truth everywhere". The dedication is appropriate, coming from a man whose entire career has been devoted not only to seeking the truth but to conveying that truth to others.

The gathering and dissemination of information, its reception and transmission, gives rise to complex questions and can be counted among the most difficult issues faced by modern man. Those who are given the power to control the flow of information need to be able to make quick decisions, to stand the test of time. Making such decisions in times of national crisis is doubly difficult. Yet Abdel-Qader Hatem managed the near impossible task. He was in charge of the dispersal of official information throughout three wars, those of 1956, 1967 and 1973. And during each of these periods of crisis, he formulated separate, but equally successful information strategies.

In his foreword to Dr Hatem's book John Bulloch, Middle East correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*, writes about the 1973 War. "It is clear from Dr Hatem's book that, as the minister responsible for information in the Egyptian cabinet, the vast improvement noted resulted from the deliberate policy which he had laid down."

In 1974 I was appointed chairman of the State Information Service, a government department started by Dr Hatem in the early fifties. The strategy laid down by Dr Hatem, and instigated by President Sadat, began to bear fruit and the department gained the kind of credibility it had previously lacked. It was clear, during the 1973 War, that the official communiques issued in Cairo were truthful, and the world began to believe us.

Apart from his controlling position at the head of the government information machine, I also had the good fortune to work with Dr Hatem at the National Specialised Councils where, for 22 years he supervised the services, education, economic and cultural councils. Indeed, after I retired from the State Information Service, I was transferred to the councils as deputy minister, and, after my retirement in 1981, became a member of the National Council for Culture and Information.

It was during this period that I was able to observe, at close quarters, the workings of Dr Hatem's mind as he oversaw the day to day running of the country's leading think-tank. The experience was educational, and resulted in a deep appreciation for the breadth of Dr Hatem's expertise. He is truly a renaissance man able, without batting an eyelid, to switch the discussion from the merits and demerits of privatisations to a learned discourse on some obscure Pharaonic monument.

Dr Hatem possesses a remarkable ability to assimilate information and then to express it in more developed and clearer form. He is one of the people whose lives represent the history of the country. In fact, in many ways, he was a maker of history, since at every historical crossroads of contemporary life his was an automatic presence.

Mursi Saad El-Din

A host of household gods

Edwar El-Kharrat's most recent work of fiction was the subject of discussion at the last meeting of the Friends of the Fine Arts. Hala Halim attended

It was only by fortuitous coincidence that the seminar on Edwar El-Kharrat's *Harig Al-Akhyla* (Fire of Fantasies), held at the Society of the Friends of the Fine Arts on 14 January was the first seminar to take place after the announcement that El-Kharrat had won the Uwais bimannual prize for fiction. Scheduled a few months ago, the seminar brought literary critic and professor of Arabic literature at Am Shams University, Sabah Fadi, and Yehia El-Rakawi, professor of psychiatry at Cairo University, together to discuss El-Kharrat's most recent novel.

Harig Al-Akhyla, which carries the subtitle "a novel", extends the techniques that have become the hallmark of the Edwar El-Kharrat text and which, arguably, reached their most distinct formulations in *Turabha Zaafaran*, which appeared in 1986 (*City of Saffron*, English translation published in 1989) and *Ya Banat Iskindirya*, 1990 (*Girls of Alexandria*, English translation published in 1993).

It is a mode which collapses the boundaries between poetry and the novel, does away with traditional linear-narrative and replaces it with chapters, each arranged around a central image and containing a collage of newspaper-clippings, of detailed descriptions of fragments of events, situations and places, of streams-of-consciousness, of passages that call allusions from heritage texts. As a critic, too, Edwar El-Kharrat has written extensively about experimentation and hybrid forms, notably in his two works *Al-Hassasa Al-Gadida* (The New Sensibility, 1994) and

Al-Kitab Al-'Abra Naw'ea (Trans-generic Writing, 1994).

Another feature of the Kharrat text evinced in *Harig Al-Akhyla* is the deliberate, tantalising blurring between fiction and autobiography. In *Turabha Zaafaran* — subtitled "Alexandrian texts" — El-Kharrat had written a fictionalised autobiography, a "portrait of the artist as a young man", in this case Mikhail, the novelist's alter-ego, who shares unmistakable features with that of the author. This was followed by *Ya Banat Iskindirya*, which can be loosely described as a sequel, in which El-Kharrat also explores the porous boundaries between fiction and reality. In *Harig Al-Akhyla*, however, El-Kharrat seems to invite the label autobiography. Whereas in previous novels he alludes to his previous works, here he makes direct mention of his own published works.

Analysing the formal and thematic fluidity of the Kharrat mode through a critique of *Harig Al-Akhyla*, Sabah Fadi proceeded dialectically, modulating on the dualities therein — fiction/autobiography and the novel/poem, among others. While citing instances of the parallelism between characters in the novel and well-known figures, Fadi was careful to set aside questions of identification as being outside the task of the critic. But it was, he offered, typical of El-Kharrat that in his "cathartic, confessional ritual", he yet "eludes" and seeks refuge in his favourite genre, fiction, instead of writing a straightforward autobiography, identifying events and figures. As instances of El-Kharrat's "deliberate

camouflage", Fadi cited the apparent absence of order or logic in the succession of press-clippings, letters, and dates.

Fadi then put forward the hypothesis that El-Kharrat is essentially "a lyrical poet who, seduced by the demons of fiction, lost his way in their labyrinth". The lyrical aspect of El-Kharrat's writing, he sees evinced in the self-centredness and idiosyncrasy of the writer's world, in his abundance passion for language and in the abundance of fleeting images that inhabit the text. Fadi then further proposed that El-Kharrat's treatises on "the new sensibility" and "trans-generic writing" were critical formulations of his own image.

To a counter-hypothesis Fadi went on to speak of the true narrative vein in El-Kharrat's writing, manifested by the polyphony of voices and multiplicity of images in his texts. There is the voice of the narrator in the 1940s, the narrator who keeps the press clippings, receives the letters of friends and observes their progress; there is the voice of the narrator 50 years later, filling in the blanks, annotating the letters, commenting on the way things fell out and ironising; there are the voices of others, in their early youth and much later, their desires and hopes, the events and incidents that led to their crossing, the narrator's path, only to be turned into material for his fiction. "Is it then fair to accuse El-Kharrat of lyricism?" asked Fadi.

Attempting to synthesize, Fadi then quoted a key passage from the novel where Egyptian gods merge with Muslim and Coptic religious figures (the fusion sig-

nified also by the absence of punctuation between the names):

"In this spot there still live Osiris Sidiqah Zeinab Sittina Dimiana, untouched by the violence of the darkness or the clamour of bombs and the din of verbosity. They are no shadows; they are with me, now, here — the people of the household. And how far they seem, too. No, they are not far."

Interpreting "the household" as Egypt, Fadi spoke of the cultural diversity of the country where opposites co-exist. Given the plurality of reality, he went on, it is not natural that signifiers should be as multiple as the signifieds, that the features of many genres should be enlisted in the representation of reality?

Turning to El-Kharrat's language, Fadi quoted one of many passages illustrating the variety of registers in his works — Qur'anic words, colloquialisms and borrowings from foreign languages. He commended El-Kharrat's singular mastery of the Arabic language. Fadi, however, went on to elaborate on the fragmentary nature of the collage-technique as practiced by El-Kharrat. The poetic flights with which the text is studded, according to Fadi, remain discrete and unconnected and thus such passages can also be arbitrarily placed elsewhere in the text. Suggesting that many of the "verbal compositions" lack dynamism, he offered the voice of the narrator replaces events in lending unity. But the device of irony, in Fadi's opinion, served El-Kharrat well in forging trans-

sitions, as in the narrator's "post-scripts" on old letters quoted. It was with a hint of bias, however, that Fadi took El-Kharrat to task for juxtaposing images of Alexandria then and now, to the detriment of the latter.

Fadi posited that El-Kharrat's texts need to read as a totality, for, like Adonis in his own way, he had created his private mythology. Fadi then concluded by quoting from the last page of *Harig Al-Akhyla*:

"I return at the end of the day, after embracing the dragon. The waves of the sea are gentle. The sky of Alexandria is clear and the sky of my soul is overcast. I heard no one call me: Edwar."

Here, said Fadi, the lyrical merges with the narrative and the mask that separates the narrator from the author is removed.

The choice of El-Rakawi as a speaker on the panel seemed fitting for a discussion of an El-Kharrat text, given that the stream-of-consciousness technique lends itself to a psychoanalytical, critical approach. In a refreshing, almost gushy manner, El-Rakawi started off by defining his position: he was there, he said, as a reader, and not a critic, a reader, moreover, who had read only two works by the author, *Fi Mahkamat Al-Sikka Al-Hadid* (In the Railway Station) and *Harig Al-Akhyla*, and could thus be considered representative of the "general reader". But what of the anticipated psychoanalytical critique? At a later stage, El-Rakawi let fall that he is opposed to psychoanalysis, that he does not belong to that school, that at no point while reading the work in hand did any psychoanalytical term jump to his mind —

not the Oedipal complex, or any of that, although, of course, he had looked with psycho-analytical eyes,

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

The birth of municipal councils towards the end of the 19th century took place in 1886 in Alexandria, the same city in which Al-Ahram was born. This was the year in which the paving commission was established in order to pave the streets of the city.

Evidently, the nascent commission was so successful within its first few months that "some dignitaries of the port city" decided "to found a municipal council in Alexandria on the model of the municipal councils in Europe". This occasion, covered in Al-Ahram's 12 July 1887 edition, marks the beginning of the history of municipal councils in Egypt as well as one of the most interesting episodes in Egyptian history at the close of the century.

It is the proposed composition of the first municipal council in Alexandria that lends this story its curious angle. The council was to have 60 members: 15 Egyptians, five Ottoman subjects (Syrians, Armenians or other Ottoman nationalities) and 40 foreigners, "16 of whom will represent the 16 nations that have political representatives in Egypt and the remaining 24 shall represent the six great powers (four each)," Al-Ahram reported.

The point must certainly have struck home to Al-Ahram's readers, on that occasion, that "the dignitaries of the port city" who made the proposal were a group of foreign residents in Alexandria. Regardless of how many influential foreigners lived in Alexandria at the time, the number of Egyptian representatives on the proposed council would not exceed a quarter of the total membership and the fact that Europeans would account for over two-thirds must have seemed a curious demand. It was not a propitious beginning because the conflicts between the European representatives in Cairo and the Egyptian government over the proposed composition of the council would delay its inception for three years. To the Egyptians, it represented another instance of the violation of their national independence.

The issue was followed more closely by Al-Ahram than by any other newspaper. The reason for this is quite straightforward — the Alexandrian identity which the newspaper and the council had in common.

The dignitaries' proposal also put in a request for a government allocation of LE38,000 "in addition to the original sums for lighting, sweeping and spraying the streets, and beyond the municipal tax levied on the citizens." In addition to street maintenance, the municipal council would also oversee the distribution of water and gas, the construction of reservoirs and the cleaning and maintenance of sewers and wells.

Over the next two years, the government drew up a plan to counter that put forward by Alexandria's European res-

idents. When it was revealed in the spring of 1889, it caused a controversy that unfolded among diplomatic circles in Cairo.

The government's counter-proposal reduced the number of municipal council members to 20. Six of the members would be senior governorate officials, at the head of whom would be the governor himself, and six would be government appointees. Of the remaining eight, three would represent export merchants, three would represent import merchants and two would represent landowners. They would be elected by their various constituencies.

On 22 March, we learn from Al-Ahram, there was a meeting of the consuls-general in the residence of the Italian consul-general. "After reading the government's proposal they requested a number of modifications," it reports.

Three days later, the consuls-general representing Italy, France, Great Britain, Germany and Austria, met with Prime Minister Riad Pasha in order to request an increase in the proportion of foreigners on the council. "Landowners and those qualified for the election would all be native Egyptians, whereas the foreigners could only find a majority among the import and export merchants," they explained. They thus recommended that in order to be eligible for election to the council, a candidate must be an Alexandrian resident, "regardless of his origin." More importantly, they wanted "the government to stipulate that in order for a candidate to be eligible for election, the rents from his property must be registered in the municipality and exceed LE75 at least." This sum, as Al-Ahram commented, "would exclude many landowners, particularly Egyptians, from the election."

Following intensive rounds of meetings between the consuls and the prominent citizens of the communities they represented and Egyptian government representatives, the government decided to accept the foreigners' requests. Al-Ahram persisted in calling for a reduction of the registered land rents to LE40 or 50 so that more Egyptians would be eligible.

The proposal was discussed between the government and foreign consuls until 30 December 1889, when it was submitted to the Shura Council for ratification. According to the final format, the municipal council would be responsible for "examining matters regarding the opening, closing, maintenance and upkeep of streets, specifying the fares of transport vehicles and rent of animals for passenger and freight transportation, reviewing road projects, regulating all public utilities such as lighting, street paving, and the cleanliness of the public market, supervising the maintenance of graveyards, slaughterhouses, public baths, pumps and fountains, as well as supervising matters regarding fire reg-

ulations, poor houses, hospitals, libraries and all municipal charitable institutions, in addition to regulating all matters regarding the general welfare of the city and finally to approve every new construction project."

On 5 January 1890, the khedive promulgated the Supreme Decree for the formation of the Municipal Council of Alexandria. Then some months later, on 4 March, Al-Ahram published the following announcement:

"All property owners registered in the public registry in the port of Alexandria and its suburbs should proceed to the premises of the royal stock exchange two days from now in order to elect the members of the municipal commission in accordance with the second article of the Supreme Decree."

Alexandria's and Egypt's first municipal council came into being in fulfillment of the khedive's royal decree, marking a new chapter in the history of urban and administrative development in Egypt. The activities of Alexandria's first municipal council were keenly followed by Al-Ahram. The newspaper regularly provided a summary of the minutes of the council's meetings and they reveal much about the nature of the functions it assumed. They also reveal the extent of European control over the council, as well as Egyptian attempts to diminish this control.

As might be expected, once it came into being, the function of the council in practice differed from those envisioned on paper. Health issues occupied a greater share of the council's attention. It is interesting that the health authority, which had been under the Ministry of Interior at that point, tried to transfer the supervision of most of its institutions to the newly established "commission" which did not have the funds to operate them. Thus, while it agreed to take control of the "street sweeping and spraying authority" it refused to accept management of the Hospital of Alexandria, although it did accept authority over the medical examinations office.

Cleanliness of streets and pedestrian lanes would have a high priority. In addition to ensuring that the streets were washed regularly, the council passed an ordinance regulating the maintenance of the cleanliness of public thoroughfares. Published in Al-Ahram's 18 December 1891 edition, the ordinance stipulated:

"Residents must dispose of all waste, dirt and refuse between dawn and eight o'clock in the morning in appropriate receptacles on the pavement." It also prohibited "bearing out carpets, rugs or other coverings from doors, windows or balconies overlooking the street" and "disposing of rink water used for cleaning windows and balconies on the streets and pavements". According to the last ar-

ticle of the ordinance, fines for violations ranged from five to 25 piastres.

The commission's concern for road repair and maintenance is illustrated by the following excerpt from the minutes of its meetings. "It has been decided to spend LE800 to repair the street leading from the eastern gate to Al-Raml and to pave it with cobblestones, and LE1036 to buy a steamroller and LE3600 to construct a street to connect Al-Qabri to the abattoir in Al-Maks." Give no relative value of the Egyptian pound, these were not insignificant sums to invest in upkeep and equipment.

The commission soon turned its attention to the construction of new public edifices: a library, a museum and public gardens. Construction of the Alexandria municipal library which acquired a reputation rivaling that of the Royal Kheidal Library in Cairo, began within the first few years of the commission's creation. In successive Al-Ahram editions of 1891 we learn how rapidly the project developed. First we read an article reporting that in response to a request submitted by the commission, the Ministry of Public Works would "collect some antiquities and diverse books to send to the commission in order to create a museum and a library." Several years later, in 1895 we read: "The Municipal Commission of Alexandria expresses its gratitude to all those who have donated books to the Library of Alexandria." Within only a few years, the library was already in full operation.

The heavy European influence on the municipal council's work and proceedings caused considerable consternation. French was imposed upon the council as its official foreign language which aroused the indignation of Egyptians. On 11 April 1891, Al-Ahram suggested that the minutes of the meetings "should be taken down in both French and Arabic simultaneously and not simply translated". Some bitterness was also aroused by the fact that the commission tended to focus its activities on the predominantly European neighbourhoods, such as Al-Raml, and to neglect the more popular and poorer Egyptian quarters. Within only a few months Al-Ahram picked up this theme when it pointed out that the commission's work on damping up the Mahmoudiya Canal in Al-Raml would impose considerable hardship upon the poor, who would be deprived of an important source of water. "They will now have to pay for water to be delivered, since there are no public water pumps in that area."

That the Europeans on the commission, consciously or unconsciously, intended to promote their influence is illustrated by an advertisement that stipulated certain qualifications applicants should have for jobs with the commission. Language was an important criterion. While Arabic was a prerequisite, the advertisement

said that prospective employees would be given a grace period in order to acquire it. The implication, of course, was that the job in question would go to a European.

The success of the services which Alexandria's municipal council brought to the inhabitants of the port inspired the citizens of other Egyptian cities to undertake the experiment. Reports from Al-Ahram's correspondents around the country tell us how quickly the demand for local municipal councils had spread. Perhaps the most insistent were the people of Damietta, where there was a pressing need for filling in swamps and proper street cleaning and repair. Nevertheless, the first municipal council to be established outside Alexandria was created in Helwan. Perhaps this is due to the segment of Egyptian aristocracy and dignitaries and the relatively high proportion of wealthy Europeans residing in that elegant suburb of Cairo.

It is interesting to note that in spite of the high proportion of Europeans in Helwan, the majority of its members were Egyptian, in contrast to Alexandria.

The close of the decade saw the continued spread of municipal councils to every major city in Egypt, to the port cities of Damietta and Suez, to Tanta, Damietta, Shebin Al-Kom, Benha, Mansoura, Zifta, Mit Ghazir, Zaragoza and Al-Mahalla Al-Kubra in the Delta and in Beni Suef, Minya and Qena in Upper Egypt. In all these cases, the initiative emanated from the cities' prominent "dignitaries" and property owners. Government approval was readily given and the dignitaries themselves were more often than not the first members of the newly created "commissions". Invariably, their petitions cited how important their city was to the welfare of the country and how numerous their populations were. The membership of the first municipal councils consisted of members of prominent families of the rural aristocracy.

In addition to the greater proportion of Egyptians on the municipal councils of the countryside, there were other important differences between them and the Alexandria model. The functions of the provincial municipal council were naturally more limited, generally restricted to cleaning, sanitation and paving the streets. Very few news items tell us of public construction projects of the nature of the library and museum of Alexandria. Needless to say, the resources of provincial councils were much smaller, constraining their abilities to fulfil certain commitments.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



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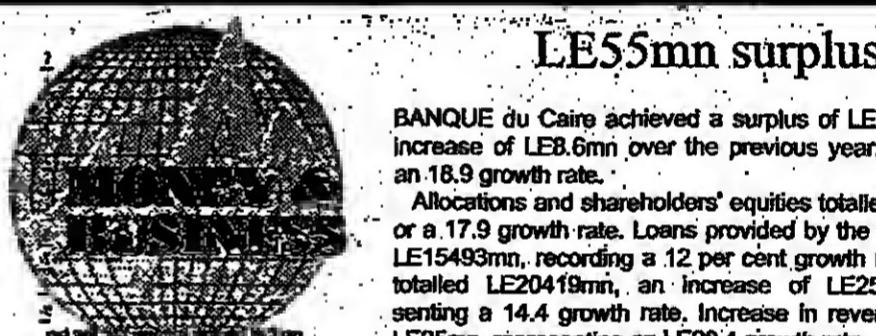
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Al-Ahram computer exhibition

THE FOURTH Al-Ahram Computer Exhibition opened at the Marriott Hotel last Tuesday.

The exhibition, which lasts 4 days, has 50 major computer companies in Egypt taking part. The exhibition is being held simultaneously with an International conference on Artificial Intelligence. Among the participants in this event are UNESCO and the British Computer Association.

MONEY & BUSINESS



BANQUE du Caire achieved a surplus of LE55mn with an increase of LE8.6mn over the previous year, representing an 18.9 growth rate.

Allocations and shareholders' equities totalled LE2916mn, or a 17.9 growth rate. Loans provided by the bank reached LE15493mn, recording a 12 per cent growth rate. Deposits totalled LE20419mn, an increase of LE2564mn representing a 14.4 growth rate. Increase in revenues reached LE25mn, representing an LE28.4 growth rate.

New measures to remove barriers facing foreign investment

THE CURRENT year will see a number of important measures being taken on the economic front with the aim of increasing exports and foreign investment.

Nawaf El-Tatawi, minister of economy and international cooperation, said that the basic elements of economic activity for the forthcoming stage will continue to focus on increasing growth and development figures, which are part of the efforts being made to encourage investment in Egypt. She explained that the first stage of the economic reform programme has realised important achievements in reducing the budget deficit, which was lowered from 23 per cent to 2.5 per cent of the total domestic revenue. Likewise, stability has been achieved in the foreign currency

market and increasing foreign currency reserves, and volume averages have realised a 3.5 per cent growth.

Looking ahead, El-Tatawi explained that the second stage of the economic reform programme will be aimed at a complete transformation of Egypt into a market economy based on competition, while maintaining its policies on improving standards of living for the poor.

The minister's words came after an Egyptian-Japanese economic summit held in Cairo yesterday. She explained that the summit was an important mechanism for encouraging cooperation between the two countries. Wahib El-Minyawi, commissioner to the minister of economy and international cooperation, added that 25 joint

projects between Egypt and Japan have been slated for future implementation.

Regarding the role of banks in encouraging outside investment, Mohamed Abdellatif Azz, head of the Federation of Banks, expressed the willingness of Egyptian banks to offer loans to major investment projects in the form of local and foreign currency up to 3 times the paid capital. This, he added, is an indication of Egyptian banks' enthusiasm in wading to

attract foreign investment.

That the future looks even brighter for foreign investment in Egypt was affirmed by Mohamed Farid Kamis, head of the Egyptian Industries Federation, who stressed that the advantages of investing in Egypt have no comparison in the region. Kamis cited the example of a meeting held this past week between President Hosni Mubarak and a number of American and Egyptian businessmen within the framework of the

Presidential Council. President Mubarak affirmed the necessity of removing all barriers facing investors in order to safeguard the benefits which they have acquired in the past and added that further benefits will be announced by the government within the forthcoming months. President Mubarak agreed that the private sector should include foreign investors in order to establish infrastructure projects in Egypt, such as electrical stations and expressways.

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Cat-C invites you to visit its booth at the Fourth Al-Ahram Computer Exhibition at the Marriott Hotel, from 16-19 January 1996. Don't let this opportunity pass you by; special discount and payment by instalments are available.



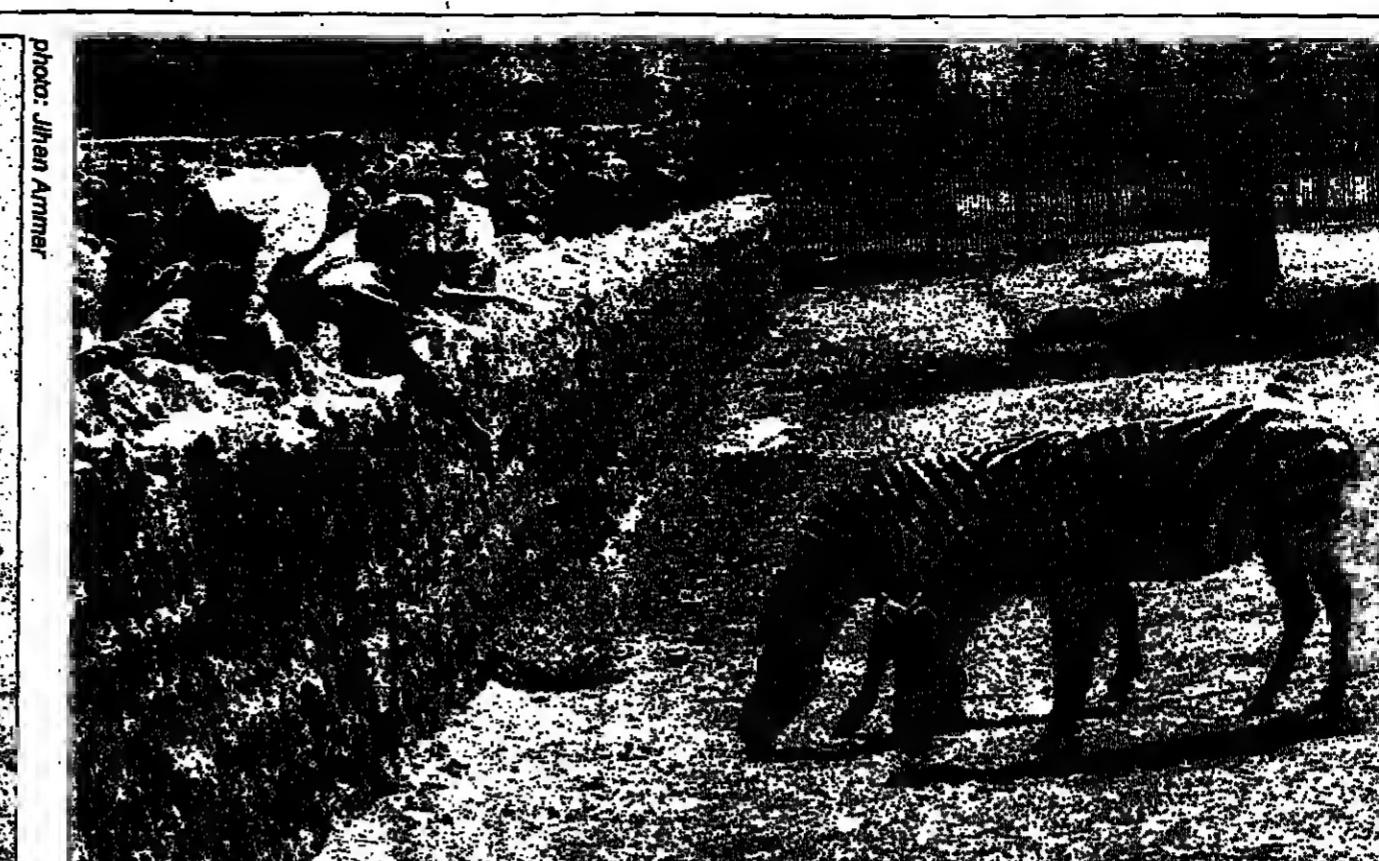
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17



Zealous zoo reforms entail providing animals a chance to live happily within their cages. By sprucing up the cages, and adding some amusing diversions, animals in the zoo will be afforded the opportunity to live longer, happier, healthier lives. For visitors, a cleaner zoo also allows them to get more up close, and personal (such as with the elephants), and witness animal behaviour in an environment resembling their natural habitat.

Lions uncaged

After years of neglect, the century-old Giza zoo is finally shaking off its cobwebs and enjoying a well-deserved face lift. Ghada Helmy tours the grounds

Despite its potential to be one of the major zoological parks of the world — with over 600 valuable species, beautifully designed gardens, giant ancient trees, and artificial coral caves — the Giza zoo and its inhabitants had, up until last year, suffered many indignities.

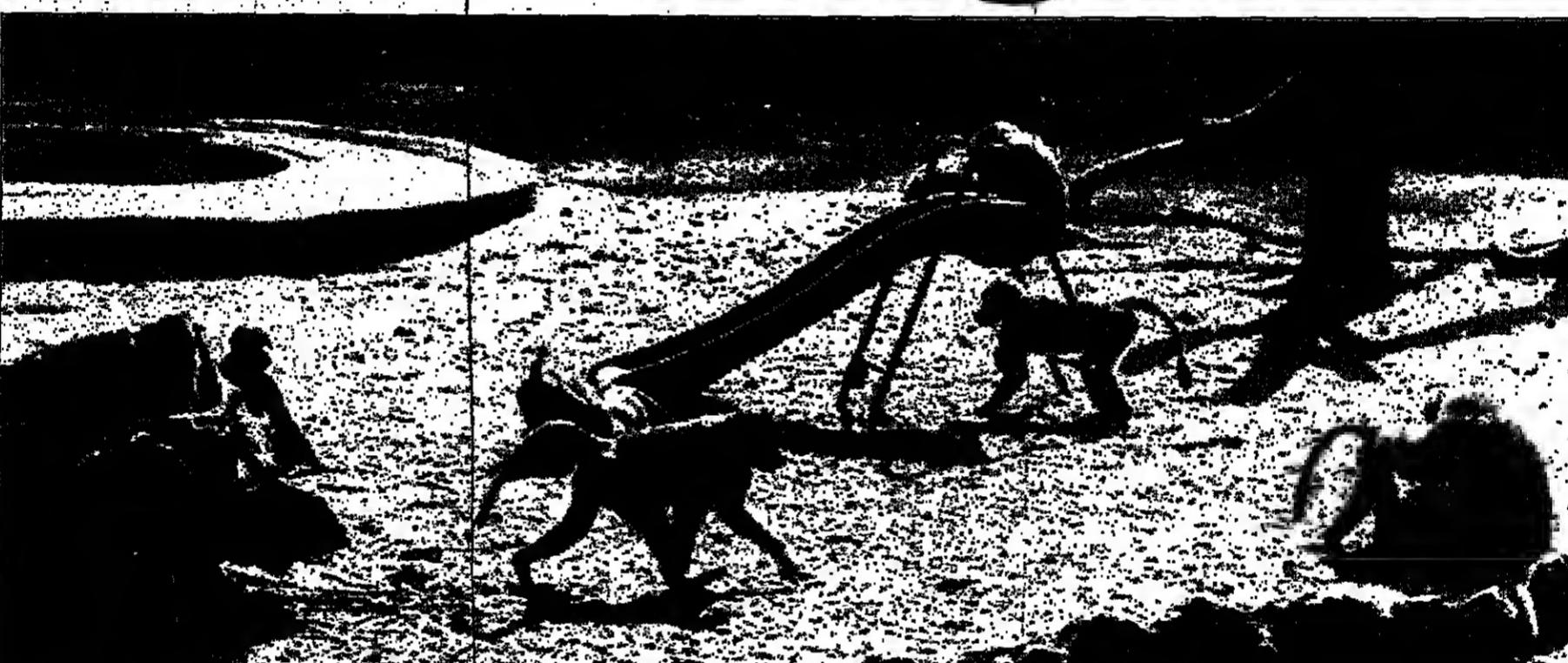
In recent years a visit to the zoo meant bracing oneself to wade through groups of harassing vendors; dodging excited teenagers who sing, dance and kick balls around the park; and stumbling over families who sit and munch on pungent foods, leaving heaps of remnants in their wake.

The animals were even more harassed: noisy crowds threw scraps and other objects at their cages, made loud noises to frightened them and banged ruthlessly on their cages. In short, the zoo, which has been open to the public since 1891, became a nightmare, for both the visitors and the wildlife.

But now things are finally changing. Last July Youssef Wali, minister of agriculture, appointed Mustafa Awad as general supervisor over the zoo. As part of his new responsibilities, Awad will oversee a large-scale renovation plan intended to transform the zoo to look more like it did in the early 1950s.

Zoo employees, often working long into the night, are now busy removing garbage heaps, clipping overgrown trees, trimming lawns, planting new beds and clearing away vast areas of tangled bush, which in one area had completely enveloped an artificial coral cave. The cave was recently uncovered and renovated, after having spent years in the dark.

The animals are already beginning to sense a change. Their dens are being purified and refreshed with clean sand, while



others are being rebuilt entirely. The lakes and ponds, home to the hippos and seal families, will be unclogged of their muddy contents and provided with clear, clean water. Soon one will be able to see the seals performing their antics and watch the chunky legs of the hippo move underwater. Storks pose gracefully, preening their feathers under sparkling sprays, while the monkeys play on their swings and monkey-go-rounds, recently brought in to dispel their boredom.

Administrators are especially concerned with improving the living conditions of the larger animals, namely lions, bears and cl-

ehubs, stresses Awad. He described plans for providing them with open yards where they can get a taste of the jungle, their true habitat. "There is already one large open exhibit where the lions roam freely," he explained. "And an ice rink will be built for the polar bears to enjoy their natural habitat too. Indeed the public and several animal rights activists have criticised the unsuitability and cruelty of the animals' cages."

The most recent addition to the already existing 600 species in the zoo are four elephants from Lusaka Zoo, in Zambia," according to Mervat Monqas, general manager of the zoo, who has been working there

for the past 30 years. Other newcomers to the zoo are baby hippos and zebras. "The zoo also makes exchange transactions with other zoos in Africa and Europe to ensure different animals are always available for visitors," she said.

But it is not just the animals and their cages that are receiving attention. The Tea Island (Geziret Al-Safa), which was once a favourite haunt of today's older generations in the good old days and of directors wishing to film the ideal love scene, will be completely renewed to resemble what it was thirty years ago — a shimmering lake with clean white ducks and a bewitching setting for customers. This is a far cry from the decrepit state the cafe had declined to in recent years.

Having been deserted for many years, the picturesque music kiosk has been renovated and is now in use once more, with a band playing every Friday. Ponies hitched to colourful carts are out for children to ride, and the Indian elephant can be seen sauntering around the park with excited children on its back — a treat long forgotten at the zoo.

The zoo's Environmental Education Centre, which is well stocked with films and slides on the history and origin of various

animals, provides visitors with useful and interesting background information. A special 15-minute video film that takes you around the zoo is also worth watching. Soon visitors will also be able to see works of art and pieces of cutlery belonging to King Farouk at a unique exhibition at the centre.

Now the passages of the zoo are furnished with detailed signs informing visitors of directions, animal locations and feeding times. Keepers have been warned to keep menacing persons away from the cages and to forbid visitors from feeding the animals. With around 7,000 visitors on Fridays and Sundays, and 3,000 on weekdays, the previous lack of such discipline often resulted in chaos.

In addition to the many improvements which have revived the park, Awad has given strict orders forbidding vendors inside the zoo. A special group of security guards has been assigned to make regular rounds of the garden to maintain a safe, orderly atmosphere as well as to ensure that tourists are not conned by quas-

guides. A recent raid revealed that mechanics and manual labourers were posing as guides and sometimes charging tourists up to LE300 for a "tour" of the garden.

After the renovations are complete, the Giza Zoological Gardens, which were established by Khedive Ismail in 1871, will be placed on the tourist map of Egypt, rather than merely being included in a list of parks. The ministry is reluctant to raise the park's entrance fee of 10 piasters, which has not budged for decades, so that the rich and poor alike will have access to it. A higher price for tourists is, however, being considered.

Book them

Bookworms with scant resources can have a hey-day at a year-round display in Alexandria. Shahira Samy files through the books on Nabi Daniel Street

This downtown street in Alexandria is known to some as a shopping area. Archaeologists consider it a likely location for the still undiscovered tomb of Alexander the Great. The stretch sandwiched between the busy Al-Shohada Square facing the railway station and Al-Horreya avenue boasts a year-round book fair. Here at Nabi Daniel, readers can find second-hand books — a rarity in the rest of Alexandria's bookshops.

Vendors are scattered along the sidewalks, sometimes hidden by cars and overshadowed by the masses of pedestrians swarming through this dense street. Though a far cry from the famous "Bouquinistes de la Seine", the Nabi Daniel book vendors display their stock and hope for a lucrative day.

According to Hussein Salman, a book vendor, most customers are students hunting for university publications and references at an affordable price.

"It really makes a difference to buy a book for LE2 or LE3 rather than LE20, the price of a brand new copy," said Salman. Medical and engineering references are the most expensive books which Salman sells, followed by law and literature texts. Novels are the least expensive.

"I come here because books are affordable," said Abdallah Mokhtar, a student at the Faculty of Science, University of Alexandria. Mokhtar mainly buys the books he needs for his studies.

Said El-Naggar, a government employee, is trying hard to improve his English. "I come to Nabi Daniel Street to look for easy reading books and grammar textbooks. I'm aware that what I find is not top quality, but it's what I can afford," he said.

Salman, like his fellow vendors, possesses an amazing ability to quickly determine the value of a book, whether its subject is German literature or mechanical engineering. "Experience more than anything else taught me how to evaluate a book," said Salman.

Religious literature has gained popularity recently, leading book sales for most vendors. Many of these books are brand new copies with subjects ranging from interpretations of the Holy Qur'an to legends about tomb curses or stories about jinn.

"These books are in high demand throughout the year, but more so during the month of Ramadan," noted Salman. Religious books are sold 30 per cent cheaper than in regular book shops.

English language literature is a big seller as well. All the current fashion and foreign computer magazines are available. Old issues of popular Arabic magazines such as *Al-Shabab* or *Al-Arabi* (The Arab) are always available. "If you want to tempt a vendor to buy your old books, make sure

to include issues of those two magazines," advised Monsi Anta, a taxi driver who was carrying a big pile of books he intended to sell.

Book dealer Ibrahim Mohamed said that he hunts for old newspapers with collector news items. "Issues carrying Abdel-Nasser's speeches or news of Sadat's assassination are sold at very high prices," said Mohamed.

Books which do not sell are taken to the nearby Al-Ahram Market, where they are sold by weight. The turnover is fast and vendors easily replenish their stock by bargaining with individuals who wish to sell second-hand copies. Usually, the beginning is heated. But these book vendors know themselves and try to price their stock accordingly.

Bargaining is part and parcel of any dealings on Nabi Daniel Street. Customers often haggle with publications reduced to as much as half the original asking price. According to book vendor Oskar Monsieur, "I usually start by setting a higher price than what I have in mind, so I end up keeping my profit and at the same time passing my customers."

To the dismay of some customers, vendors very often stick to their original asking price. Mo Faro, a university student recalled, "I once found a very important book I needed badly. Although its price was given was not exorbitant, I vehemently declared that I would only take it at half the price. 'Suit yourself,' was the reply I received, and I left without the books I really wanted."

Rising tension between book sellers and the local police makes job security a tricky question for book vendors. Sayed Abdel-Al, who has been working as a book vendor for over 25 years, complained at the police are a constant annoyance. "They confiscate our books and harass us endlessly," he alleged.

Some suggest the best idea would be to petition city officials for a permanent area to allow them to display their books. But many book sellers believe such a move would hurt business. "People are familiar with us on Nabi Daniel Street and we can't afford to lose any customers," explains Salma. Other sellers agreed and added that their profit margin was so small that any drop in the sales would immediately be felt.

District officials told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that there is no plan in the works to relocate the vendors. "These vendors are peddlers. They should sit there in the first place and that's why the police have every right to raid the area," said one official.

Edited by Fouad El-Gawhary



Photo: Gamal Sait

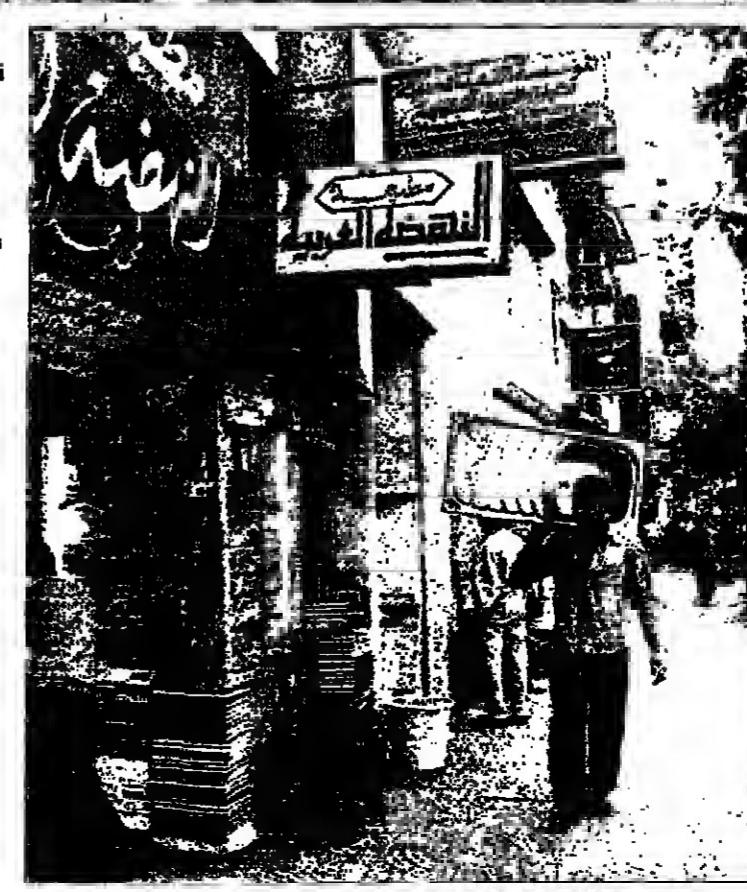


Photo: Jihan Ammar

Down the drain

THE BATTLE for Faggala Street's soul is being fought among book vendors and plumbing suppliers. As hardware vendors encroach upon book vendors' territory, the street is no longer the clean, wide alley it once was. Today, a trip to Faggala Street reminds one of a bustling *souq*, writes Naglaa Sait.

Anis Mansour, a prominent writer, warns that the very cultural essence of Faggala Street is at stake. Faggala Street once resembled the Latin Quarter in Paris. With the continuous increase in the price of paper and printing material, the high rate of illiteracy and the growing presence of hardware vendors, the book trade on Faggala Street is in danger of extinction," he lamented.

During the reign of Mohamed Ali, Faggala was home to quite a different "cultural" scene: bars and inns. In the 1940s, book shops began to sprout along the street which proved to be a central location for bookworms from Zamalek, Giza and Heliopolis. By the early 50s, three major literary book shops with publishing houses, namely Maktabat Misr, Dar Al-Hilal, and Dar Al-Istiqbal, chose Faggala Street as home. In those days, the works of Naguib Mahfouz, Ihsan Abd-el-Qodous, Yousef Idris and Yousef El-Sebai were published in Faggala Street, propelling a literary movement.

"Faggala is more than a place where a number of merchants earn their living. It is part of our cultural heritage. It would be a shame to see Faggala lose its cultural identity to profit-making schemes that breach the original traditions and purpose of the area," says poet Farouk Guweida.



Narrow streets in Boulaq

World Trade Centre on the Corniche

photo: Sherif Sanbo Bargaining for second-hand clothes in Wikala Al-Balad

photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

Close encounters:

Neighbourhoods in contrast

In the third of the Weekly's occasional series, two very different Cairo neighbourhoods are highlighted — Boulaq and Zamalek. Separated by the Nile but joined by Abu-Ela Bridge: one is a heavily populated centre of working class life, and the other an elegant residential district with high rises and boulevards

Though only separated by the main branch of the Nile, Zamalek and Boulaq could hardly be more different. Shadowed by graceful trees, the apartment and villa-lined streets of Zamalek — away from the busy 26th July thoroughfare — are never too crowded for prosperous residents to take a morning jog. But just across the iron Abu-Ela Bridge, in crowded Boulaq, ramshackle buildings are so close that second-storey neighbours can shake hands and eavesdrop on private conversations on opposite balconies.

Some say that Boulaq was named by occupying French troops who in the early nineteenth century called their riverside encampment "bain lac", or "beautiful lake". But for several hundred years before then the area was the location of Cairo's docks, the city's river link with the Mediterranean and from there to Istanbul — an important connection to the time of Ottoman rule of Egypt. Mohamed Ali subsequently developed and enlarged the function of the neighbourhood as part of his modernisation plan. At the turn of this century canals stabilised the shoreline, preventing flooding and enabling the area to develop further as an inland trading district. Wikala Al-Balad, a flea market in the heart of Boulaq, is a contemporary continuation of the neighbourhood's function as a trading centre. In Arabic the market's name means "trading area for dates", so

called because at the beginning of the century the market was the focus of the country's flourishing date trade.

But in the mid-fifties, when British troops left Egypt, their abandoned belongings were sold at rock-bottom prices in Wikala Al-Balad. This marked the beginning of the neighbourhood's current thriving business: the sale of second-hand clothes. Now textiles, household goods and even used car parts are also sold in the area.

Prices in Wikala Al-Balad are low. A pair of trousers is LE5. A skirt costs LE10 or less. Even new items, like gaudily embroidered wedding dresses, are no more than LE200. The noise level is high, as merchants standing at the entrances of stores with racks of clothing from floor to ceiling compete to attract customers by loudly extolling the virtues of their second-hand garments. Most customers do not have a lot to spend, and Wikala Al-Balad is packed on the eve of feasts with bargain hunters.

A mere ten-minute walk from the alleys of Wikala Al-Balad is a far quieter, more sanitised environment. In the exclusive shops of the World Trade Centre, some sales assistants display a studied indifference to their customers, even if they have guaranteed lines of credit. Stepping inside the air-conditioned mall, one enters a bewilderingly differ-

ent world where the designer label is king, English make-up, Italian shirts and ties, French swimming suits, American frozen yoghurt and Egyptian silver work are all on display, alongside clothes from branches of the more fashionable Egyptian chain stores. Astronomical price tags in many of the shops mean that most customers can only admire the goods: evening gowns costing LE7,000, jackets selling for LE2,000, and polyester swimming suits with LE700 labels.

"It's imported," say the shop assistants, as if that justified charging prices rivaling most people's monthly — or even yearly — incomes. "It's from so and so's designer house", they add, as though only a fool would not understand the value of paying thousands for a small label sewn into a neckline. And without the breathless commentaries of the shop assistants so much would be incomprehensible. "This is the top of a two-piece evening outfit", said one holding up what appeared to be a brassiere, before adding that what she claimed was the skirt to match the "top".

But if the World Trade Centre is out of place in its neighbourhood of Boulaq, perhaps its piped music and pulsations would seem more appropriate in the wealthier neighbourhood of Zamalek on the other side of the river, just across the old bridge of Abu-Ela. Development of Zamalek was begun by

Egypt's 19th century rulers. In 1830, Mohamed Ali constructed a retreat of the island, then only accessible by bat and periodically flooded. But canals built in the 1860s ended the floods, and the later construction of the Abu-Ela Bridge helped pave the way for the building.

The local elite have always constituted the largest part of Zamalek's population. During the first half of this century, the pastels made the island an exclusive neighbourhood of villas with private landscaped sides. Today, boxy apartment buildings have replaced most of the villas, but prices are still sky high. However, amidst the urban development, some of the old landmarks of Zamalek remain among them the Fish Garden and the central section of what is now the Marriott Hotel and was originally a palace.

A landscaped park with a small grotto in the middle, the Fish Garden has long lost its purpose as an exotic stadium and is essentially used as a public park. Visitors, particularly midweek, include amorous couples exchanging whispered conversation and gifts. Afternoons, families with children also walk around the park's curved paths. In the grotto, the fish aquaria are not the focus of attention: children run through the dark passageways, while enterprising young men seize the opportunity for a rare moment of intimacy with their veiled girlfriends.

Built to resemble an Italian grotto in 1876, the Fish Garden owes its beginnings to Khedive Ismail. Some of its 40 aquaria exhibit different species of salt and freshwater fish and water animals. It welcomes visitors from 8.30am to 1.30pm for an entry fee of a few piastres. An hour is plenty of time to explore its parks.

At the other end of the island lies the Marriott Hotel. Its central section was built by Khedive Ismail as a palace in the 1860s. France's Empress Eugenie stayed there when she came to Egypt in 1869 to attend the opening of the Suez Canal. In 1893 the palace was sold to tourism entrepreneurs who turned it into the Gezira Palace Hotel. After another spell of private ownership, it was turned into a hotel again during the middle part of this century, this time with the more ornate name of Omar Al-Khayam. Maintaining its surrounding maze of old trees, the Omar Al-Khayam was a popular rendezvous for couples, particularly university students, who surreptitiously met in its gardens. In the seventies, when the Marriott chain bought the hotel, these gardens were replaced by the twin towers which now flank the original palace. But the small garden and the terrace cafe are still popular, and after a morning spent exploring the alleys of Boulaq and the streets of Zamalek, a lemon juice or coffee on the terrace of the royal residence-turned-hotel is very welcome.

Statues were true portraits

Although many ancient wooden statues are in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, others are scattered in collections throughout the world. Lyla Finch Brock reports on recent discoveries about this little-known art form

Were wooden statues stashed in caches like the famous royal mummy finds of the 1800s, or were the statues buried in the court of Amenhotep III in Luxor Temple? Julia Harvey, a specialist in Old Kingdom wooden statuary thinks so. "I believe that every modern discovery of a group of wooden statues is actually a rediscovery", she said in a lecture at the Netherlands Institute. "Statues from robbed tombs were probably gathered up in ancient times by priests of the necropolis and re-buried in other tombs to preserve them, just like the mummies."

According to Harvey, wooden statues were important because they represented the tomb owner, perhaps as his *ka* or double. In some cases many duplicates have been found, sometimes wearing different costumes. The painted statues, made of several types of local wood, are usually mounted on bases. They often hold staffs and sceptres and have hinged arms. Male statues

were commonly painted red, female statues yellow. Quality and size tended to diminish as quantity increased.

From studying reliefs depicting workshops, Harvey has concluded that a completely different group of workmen were involved in carving wooden and stone statuary. Unlike stone statuary, which she feels was copied from models, wooden statues were more likely to be true portraits, sometimes made with inlaid eyes to enhance their life-like quality. However, fewer examples of wooden statues are in existence because they were prey to white ant infestation.

Most discoveries of Old Kingdom wooden statues have been at Saqqara, although some come to light during the clearing of the *mashabat* at Giza during the 1920s and 1930s by George Reisner. Perhaps the most famous is a fifth dynasty statue discovered by Mariette in Saqqara. Dubbed "Sheikh Al-Balad" by the workmen because of its

resemblance to the village headman, it is now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

Harvey spent five years visiting museums round the world, and has collected information on 217 wooden statues. Old Kingdom wooden statuary had never been thoroughly studied before. In fact, it is not even known exactly where statues were placed within a tomb because none have been found in situ. But Harvey has devised a system of analysis based mainly upon the statues' costumes, stance and hairstyles. As a result of her studies she was able to verify the authenticity of a wooden statue in a British collection, which was previously suspected of being a fake. One interesting observation that Harvey has made is that almost all existing wooden statues are male — whether this is because female statues never survived, or because they have disappeared, remains unknown.

New display at Cairo museum
A newly-found jewellery collection, now restored, is on display for the first time. Nevine El-Aref reports

A unique collection of Middle Kingdom jewellery is now on display at Cairo museum. It belongs to Semerk III's mother, Queen Weret, and consists of a necklace, girdle, five bracelets and two anklets made of gold, carnelian, lapis lazuli, turquoise and smoky quartz.

The collection was found scattered in a container hidden in a niche inside the queen's tomb, located at the south-west corner of Semerk III's pyramid complex at Dahshur.

According to Mohamed Saleh, general director of the museum, the tomb was discovered in 1994 by a team from the Metropolitan Art Museum, New York. The collection pieces were broken and the beads scattered. Reconstruction of each item was based on observation of similar objects as depicted in Egyptian art.

"Reconstruction took four months of painstaking work," said Samir Abaza, head of the restoration department at the museum.

The five bracelets are of different shapes and sizes. The two large ones have locks of pillar-clasp, the symbol of stability in ancient Egypt. The other three are similar in shape and size, made of small beads of lapis lazuli, turquoise, carnelian and smoky quartz. Two were ornamented with an unusual pair of amethyst scarabs, with the name of Pharaoh Amenemhat II inscribed on them, while the third was decorated with a large turquoise bead.

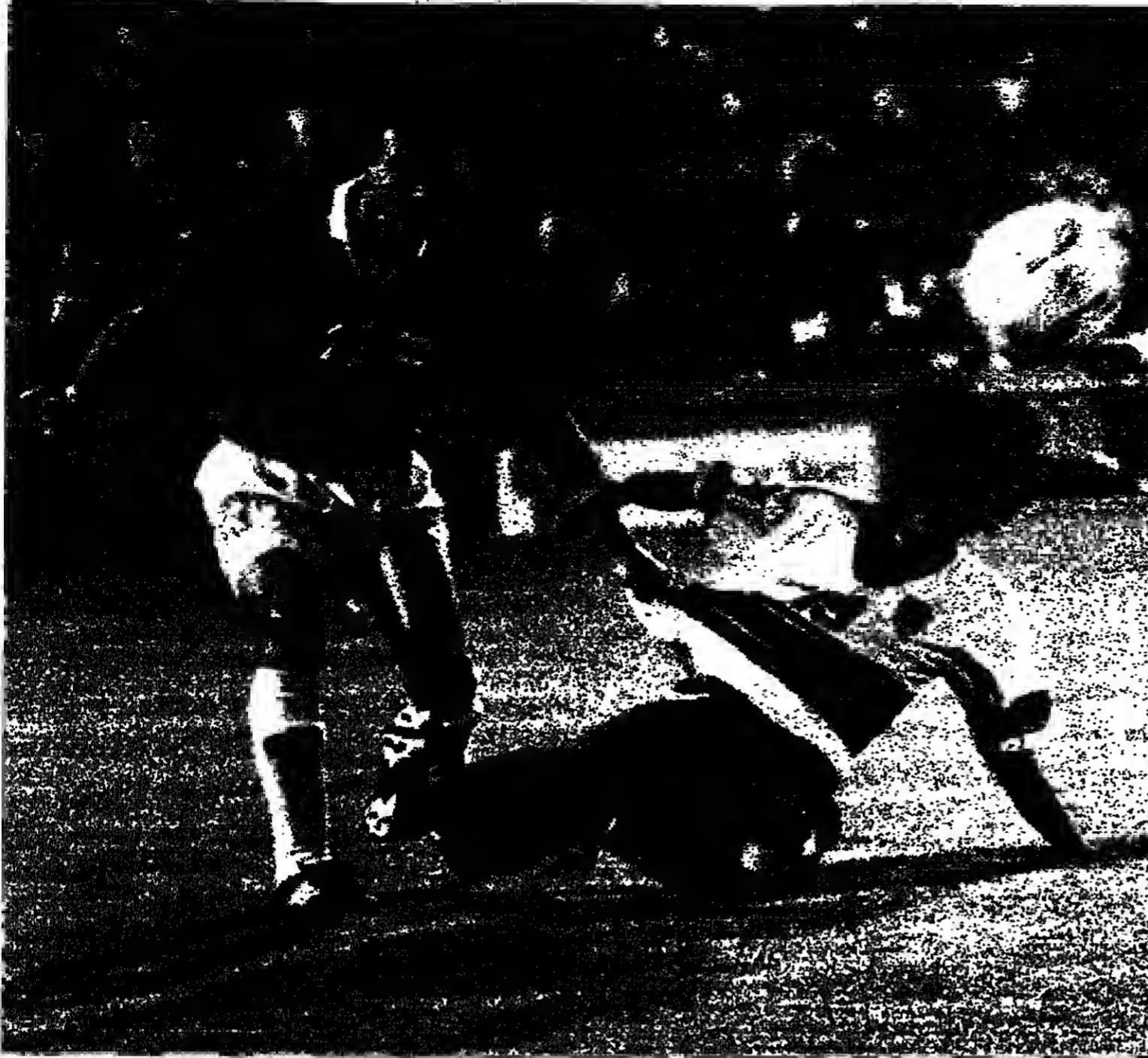
"The small turquoise scarabs in the collection have no engravings on them and were probably worn as rings," said Saleh.

The anklets are large and have vulture-claw pendants. The girdle is made of two rows of beads ornamented with golden cowrie shells. The necklace has an exquisitely rendered square clasp which has a hieroglyphic text forming the phrase: "The hearts of the two gods are content". Two golden lion brooches complete the collection.



Offering bearers with various produce

photo: Mohamed Waziri



In the spirit of sportsmanship, Egypt's Ali Maher helps Angola's Walter Nova Estrada feel the rough texture of the field (photos: AFP)



France's Stephen Stoecklin goes airborne on Egypt's Hazem Awad, to drill the ball home

rast ACN cup capers

Five days after the 20th African Cup of Nations (ACN) began in Johannesburg, Nigeria's decision to withdraw from the competition still casts a shadow over the championship.

Protests and pleas by fans who argued that the Nigerian government's decision to pull out of the ACN was a slap in the face of sportsmanship, fell flat, as did efforts by Joao Havelange, president of the International Football Federation (FIFA), who called upon Nigerian officials to relent and allow fans another chance to watch the Green Eagles, Nigeria's team, in action again. For his trouble, Havelange, 24 hours before the tournament began, had still not received a response from Nigeria's president—or, for that matter, even spoken to him. The Green Eagles have twice emerged victorious in the ACN.

Nigeria's obstinate abstinence stems from sanctions imposed against it by the Commonwealth countries following the execution of several human rights activists. Other observers, however, assert that Nigeria's decision to pull out of the ACN is an act of revenge aimed at host country South Africa, which refused to grant the Nigerian team entry into the Four Nations tournament held in that country two months ago.

In either case, however, the vacuum

created by Nigeria has led to a wave of speculation by football experts on who will take its place. "Nigeria's absence has revived the hopes of many countries like Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and South Africa," said Abdou Salih El-Wahab, a member of the African and International Football Federations' technical committee. "Their chance to win the cup have increased substantially."

But as a cautionary note, he added, "Football is full of surprises, and the outcome does not always fall in line with predictions, expectations or probabilities."

"This is why I think that all the teams that will reach the quarterfinals will have an equal shot in the championship," said El-Wahab.

For Egypt, this may be a blessing in disguise. "The group that Egypt will compete in is made up of Angola, Cameroon and South Africa," he said. "It's a chance to qualify for the quarterfinals and move onto the semifinals, therefore, are good. I think this is what Egyptian officials will focus on, at least for now."

Behind the scenes and off the field,

the ACN was punctuated with a good deal of activity on the part of top international football officials headed by

FIFA president, Havelange, Lennart

Johansson, head of the European Foot-

ball Federation, and Joseph Blatter and other presidents of continental federations in Asia, North and South America.

It wasn't just the promise of fancy footwork and action that brought these head honchos over to South Africa. On the contrary, they are engaged in a struggle of their own—for the soon to be up-for-grabs FIFA presidency. Like any other candidates, these continental federation leaders are currently attempting to lobby in order to gain the much-needed African votes to win the office. In the middle of this race are Johansson and Havelange. The current FIFA president held an international press conference at the beginning of the ACN in which he expressed his tremendous respect for the African peoples and their accomplishments. "I can see no difference between African and European teams," he told reporters. "For example, I didn't notice any difference between the way Nigeria and Italy were playing in the 1994 World Cup."

Expressing his dismay at Nigeria's decision to pull out of the competition, he, however, refused to make a connection between politics and football, insisting only that Nigeria may be banned from taking part in the upcoming World Cup qualifiers should

the African Football Federation deem such a move necessary.

The elections for the Confederation of African Football's officials, however, did not draw much attention in Johannesburg. With many of the candidates withdrawing from the race for the benefit of other candidates, no major reshuffling was evident. Issa Hayatou retained his presidency for the third straight year, and Egypt's Mohamed Ahmed held onto the vice presidency for another year due to the withdrawal of Somalia's Farah Eddo from the race. "I love Egypt too much to stand in the way of one of his highly qualified officials," said Eddo. And, in a classic example of one hand washing the other, Tunisia's Salim 'Alouli joined Eddo in stepping aside to allow Ahmed smooth passage. One good match deserves another, and Ahmed resigned his post as the African representative on FIFA's executive committee to make way for 'Alouli.

On the field, the action continued.

On Monday, Egypt pushed past Ango-

la to win 2-1 and take second in its group while South Africa took first.

Ahmed El-Kass, in a flurry of passing and punting, scored the team's two match goals within the span of two minutes in the first half. In the second half, Angola came back to score but couldn't tie.

After six days of stiff competition between eight

of the world's best handball teams, world number

six-ranked Egypt placed fourth in the 7th Handball World Cup which was held in Sweden from

9-14 January.

Frostbite and the winter chill served only to harden the Egyptian team's resolve to secure a strong finish in this competition which included France, Croatia, Sweden, Germany, Russia, Switzerland and the Czech Republic.

In the preliminary round, Egypt got off to a heated start, playing three matches. The team won the matches against Croatia 26-22 and the showdown with Germany 17-15. But, a temporary thaw set the Egyptians behind in the match against Russia, which they lost 26-32. Finishing behind the Russians, Egypt, however, made it into the semi-

finals, as did Group A competitors, France and Sweden. The home court advantage worked in favour of the Swedes who pushed past the French in the Group A preliminaries to win 27-25.

In the semifinals, Egypt went up against Sweden, but after a thrilling battle of skill and speed, narrowly lost 19-20, allowing the Swedes to move up to the finals where they played the Russians. The Russians had defeated the French team in the semifinals, 34-27.

Amid a throng of 10,000 screaming fans, who were stamping their feet in support, or trying to get warm, Sweden brushed past Russia to capture first place for the second consecutive year with a 23-21 victory.

Despite their best efforts, the Egypt team couldn't get back on track after the loss to Sweden. In the play-offs, France trounced Egypt 30-21, took third place and forced the Egyptians to grudgingly accept fourth. Germany took fifth, defeating the Swiss, who took sixth, 22-21. The Czechs thrashed the Croats 25-19, making sure that they

were not left in eighth place.

Commenting on the performance of the Egyptian team, head of the technical committee for both the Egyptian and International Handball Federation, Hassan Mustafa, said that despite a good finish, Egypt could have played better. Obstructing its path to the finals, however, were a series of injuries sustained by team members both before and during the World Cup which impaired the team's ability to perform. Sameh Abdel-Wahab, the team's key player, for example, injured his knee in France and was not able to participate. He did, however, manage to fly to Sweden with the team and provide moral support. And with the competition now over, he will stay on to receive treatment and a little moral support of his own.

Mustafa added that during the play-off match against France, two other key players, team captain Yasser Labib and Ashraf Awad, were injured. With these two unable to complete the match, the team's performance dropped.

The prognosis was not all doom and gloom, however. Egypt's Ahmed El-Atar was selected by the championship's organizing committee, along with Sweden's Mats Olsson and Erik Hagas, France's Stephan Stoecklin and Stephan Jolin, Russia's Oleg Kouleibod and Dimitri Torgovanov, to play on the All-Star team.

In related events, on Sunday, the drawing for the teams to participate in the handball competition in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics was held. Twelve teams will participate in the men's event and eight in the women's. Egypt will play in Group B along with France, Germany, Algeria, Cuba and the winner of the European Cup which will be held in Spain soon.

Group A is made up of Croatia, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, Kuwait and the US. The Olympic handball competition is set to begin on 24 July and will continue until 4 August.

An eagle's eye

Old age, in the minds of many senior citizens, is a chance to sit back, relax, enjoy the fruits of their labour. It is also a period much celebrated for the wisdom that one has gathered over the years, and time for pleasure always down memory lane.

But for Abdel-Azim El-Ashri, while many of his friends rest in rocking chairs sporting *galabiyas*, it's still business as usual. For 57 years, El-Ashri has been in the business of basketball.

He was first introduced to the game at the local YMCA in Cairo in the 1930s. While in his mid-teens, he and his team mates often played against visiting American teams, who also found it "fun to play in the YMCA". But for El-Ashri, despite the fact that he appeared to be a promising player, that measure of satisfaction that other players found in dribbling the ball up and down the court in an attempt to stuff it into the net—that certain *je ne sais quoi*—was missing.

Like other players, El-Ashri entertained notions of stardom. "Every player is waiting for his star to rise, for that moment when fans rush him on the streets screaming for autographs or a vigorous handshake," he said. But, with a tendency to critique the way his friends played the game, and the uncanny ability to call it like he sees it, he began to question his desire to be a player at the same time his friends were questioning whether they should remain his friends.

Instead of focusing on perfecting his playing skills, El-Ashri found himself more interested in the job performed by the American referees who accompanied the visiting teams. And, like most adolescents, he faced a quandary: to play or not to play was the question. "I couldn't seem to decide: follow the road to fame or relegate myself to the shadowy world of officiating," recalled El-Ashri.

In a last ditch effort to reach for the stars, El-Ashri, at the tender age of 23, earned a spot on the Alhi Club basketball team. And, for nine

years, he went through the motions with a measure of distaste. At every opportunity, he chose to referee the game instead of participating in it. Finally, in 1947, he came to terms with the truth by convincing himself that "It's not what you want to be that matters, it's what you can be."

"I came to realize that being a referee was as important as being a player, and I will continue to judge games until the last drop of blood in my body is gone," he said with a measure of mad conviction.

It was this steely resolve and belief in his cause that propelled El-Ashri to fame and earned him the title, "Father of the Game", as he came to be known in Egypt and Africa. Learning that the Egyptian national basketball team was

Abdel-Azim El-Ashri has single-handedly elevated African basketball to international standards with a cool head and a sharp eye. Nashwa Abdel-Tawab profiles the "Father of the Game"



no one might take him seriously upon arrival. To his surprise, after being tested, he was given the International Officiating Badge. He then referred

a game between Korea and Argentina, and earned the kudos and respect of the officials present.

From there onward, it was smooth sailing. Following his debut at the European Championships in Argentina and the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki.

But in 1956, tragedy struck. The start

of the Suez War in

October of that year meant that El-Ashri could not travel to Melbourne for the 1956 Olympics. It also meant that he could not get a refund for the airline ticket that he had purchased. By then, however, his reputation had begun to precede him. He was

years. "Those were the best days of my life," recalled El-Ashri. "I loved to travel and I love basketball. It was the best of both worlds."

Many athletes often wish for the chance to give something back to the game, feeling that it is responsible for who they are. El-Ashri shared the same belief, and his chance came in 1965 when he was elected the first General-Secretary of the African Basketball Organisation (ABO), a post he held for almost 30 years. Before 1960, Egypt and the other North African countries were considered to be part of Europe for sports purposes.

It was a decision in 1960 by the International Basketball Federation (IBF) that paved the way for this move. The IBF decided to found an African federation, and Egypt, due to her leadership in the region, was nominated to establish the organisation which was to become the ABO. Under El-Ashri's leadership, the number of countries with membership in ABO increased from 11 to 47, and basketball quickly became the most popular African sport after football.

Using his position of power in the basketball world, El-Ashri dedicated the last three decades to promoting the sport, training other African international referees and organising juniors and seniors tournaments for both men and women. As a result of his efforts, there are now 30 Egyptians with similar qualifications and another 170 African basketball referees.

The key to this kind of success, he noted, is not to focus just on being a star. "Being a referee is like being a judge, you have to be firm but fair in the way you enforce the rule," he said. And, in a world undergoing massive political, social and economic changes, tormented by hunger, disease and war, these are words to live by.

Edited by Inas Mazhar

Ali Hassan Coban:

There for the art

Nubian rhythms
and jazz sounds:
the fusion
is electric

Ali Hassan Coban was born in Nubia on 29 December 1929. As far back as anyone can remember, the area where he was born was called Al-Shallat (Waterfalls), perhaps because it was once an important harbour. After the High Dam was built, though, Al-Shallat receded from the commercial front line. But it never became a backwater. The continuous to and fro of ideas and moods, music and cultural influences, has never really stopped.

Amidst all the musical jumble and the steady surge towards Aswan, and later Cairo, the name of Ali Hassan Coban recurs almost continuously. Coban has been revered as a pioneer of musical innovation, adapting international jazz modes to the pentatonic rhythms and beat of traditional Nubian music. He has also been accused of debasing centuries-long traditions to what is loosely termed *Nubi-Shaabi* (Nubian-popular) music.

"I never planned it as such and it didn't quite start out in any systematic manner. I wasn't really a musician. As a child I would sing along and sing during weddings or at some function or other. Then, like any other Nubian boy, I learned the secret art of playing the local percussion instruments. Not a secret, really, but simply an ethnic pentatonic scale different from that used by musicians in the north."

It was only after Coban moved to Cairo that he began to study music seriously. "I learned to differentiate between professional singing and the more intuitive mode I had grown accustomed to doing back home. There we all got the make-shift stage or stood in the centre of the gathering, in a small room or someone's backyard, and sang in unison. We all sang together, irrespective of age or vocal abilities. It was all raw and unrehearsed, and probably still is. Maybe that's where the magic is." In Cairo, however, he learned how to divide the song into couplets and paragraphs, stanzas with instrumental interludes and solo musicianship stringing them together. "I learned that I could sing and have the group answer back, sing together and still go solo. A whole new world opened up for me."

Coban came to Cairo in 1942. It was the thing to do, and to a

great extent still is. Parents send the kids off to the capital to work and earn a living. This was the way to guarantee a fair chance of improving the family's financial status. "It was hopeless in Aswan — at the very best, precarious. One had to go try one's luck at finding a job in 'Egypt'. This had nothing to do with art or music. It had everything to do with livelihood. When I first came I worked as an apprentice tailor. I came to Cairo and settled in Abdin."

The Abdin area, formerly the king's neighbourhood, has traditionally been a magnet for Nubians migrating to the city. Coffee houses and shops have flourished as the community grew and a sense of togetherness and security developed. More importantly, if one was to flourish as a singer or dancer at Nubian weddings, what better place to reside than next door to potential customers? Being constantly available is what makes or breaks an artist, in any language and in any country. That, in essence, Coban explains, is what they call "show biz".

Enсоnsed in the shadow of the royal palace, Coban inevitably met the king. "I was still with the boy scouts and we were performing a Nubian song and dance at the old Opera House. It was the first song ever performed that had no instruments. The rhythm depended entirely on clapping. That's the way the Nubians do it. Every couplet is interspersed with clapping. This was way back in 1947. At the time, women or girls were not allowed to sing or appear in public. I dressed as a girl and danced our folkloric dances. The king and one of the ministers made a bet on whether I was a girl or not. They bet a silver riyal (20 pt.). Later they took me to the king who was amazed and asked what my name was. I said Ali, and the minister won the bet, but he gave me a Sultan Hussein piastre. It

may have seemed a paltry sum then but it meant a lot to me."

At the time, a band of jazz musicians from Harlem were performing at the Gezira Sporting Club. For the first time, Coban heard the sounds of the trombone, the clarinet and the saxophone, guitars and a jazz drum set. "They were all black. We all related very strongly. I wondered why we weren't doing something similar. I thought: if they can do it why can't we? It seemed simple at the time. I never considered any political implications. I was, and still am, quite apolitical. It was just music. I was enthralled by the sounds."

Coban's enthusiasm is so palpable one becomes drawn to the sense of well-being he exudes. He is never patronising. He seems enthralled by events, still: no cynicism, not even a hint of world-weariness. After all, he has marched on through the reign of King Farouk, the social upheaval and turbulence of the sixties, the flood of requests for the genre of music he was pioneering in the seventies. He is finally confident of his place in history: his tapes and CDs pronounce him "the godfather of Nubian music".

Not that it was easy. But to hear him, Coban's unique fusion was merely "a matter of adjusting the sounds coming from these Western instruments so that they blended with our culture. All true Nubian folklore is pentatonic."

The Coban sound was not accepted immediately. It met with violent resistance, in fact, and bitter resentment — mainly from the more traditional musicians who felt their territory was being invaded. "They felt that any alteration would do away with cultural values. I saw that any addition would only enrich these values. We won over the younger generation, not only here but also in Europe. They were willing to experiment with sounds and trends. When

Iana, Kalashba and Selwa, to name just a few, go to great lengths to acquire Bob Marley T-shirts, buy all his tapes and even torture their hair to create a quasi-Rastafarian look. These boys hardly know any English, let alone Jamaican English. Yet Rastafarian culture looms large in their legend, extending to areas less connected with musical appreciation." In their frustration, young boys either swing to their deep roots, or accept their second choice, in this case crossover artists like Mohamed Mounir, Hassan Gazeuli or Ali Hassan Coban. Of these, both Mounir and Coban have broken into the long-sought international market.

"We hit Europe in 1970 with *Sokkar Sokkar* (Sugar Sugar) later renamed *Walk Like A Nubian* for merchandising purposes. It was initially recorded in Egypt, then it was re-recorded and re-mixed in Germany in 1989. Now there is the American release, renamed *From Nubia To Cairo*."

As a matter of fact, there was much talk about those aborted concerts and tremendous disappointment after their cancellation. "Young people, not only in Aswan proper but in Daraa, Balata, Kalsheba and Selwa, to name just a few, go to great lengths to

acquire Bob Marley T-shirts, buy all his tapes and even torture their hair to create a quasi-Rastafarian look. These boys hardly know any English, let alone Jamaican English. Yet Rastafarian culture looms large in their legend, extending to areas less connected with musical appreciation." In their frustration, young boys either swing to their deep roots, or accept their second choice, in this case crossover artists like Mohamed Mounir, Hassan Gazeuli or Ali Hassan Coban. Of these, both Mounir and Coban have broken into the long-sought international market.

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What's in a name? Coban plays for the joy of it. "I perform because I love art. I love entertaining people. As long as you're going straight, what's there to fear? Even when we're in Europe, I leave all discussions and contracts to my manager. I'm there to perform. He does the talking. He is fully in charge of matters. If there is any doubt, we confer, otherwise I'm there for the art."

Coban has ridden the wave of passion for anything ethnic that has swept across Europe since the nineties. He's done most of Europe and now it's time for America. "It's great. But what I really want is more exposure from our own television, here in Egypt. Not just me, but all Nubian art."

Profile by Mohamed Shebl

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris



Ambassador Blatherwick welcomes Dr Mursi, Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire to the club photo: Nasr Attia

There was one occasion this week in particular which was absolute joy to attend. I received word from HE David Blatherwick, British ambassador to Cairo, that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II had ordered that my longtime colleague and friend Dr Mursi Saad El-Din be presented with the medal of an honorary Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (CBE). Speaking to Mursi, I could see, that beneath his calm, dignified exterior, he was as excited as I was. My anticipation was beginning to reach new extremes, and it seemed like a lifetime before I was on my way to the British Embassy in Garden City with my Editor-in-Chief Hosny Gandy, Managing Editor Hanif Shukrallah and Travel Editor Jill Kamel.

The party, set in the stately surroundings of the British Embassy, was spectacular. My efforts to spot as many renowned figures as possible, however, were hastily brought to an end when HE David Blatherwick CMG, OBE cleared his throat, signaling the commencement of the ceremony. Addressing over 50 distinguished guests, including former First Lady Jelena El-Sadat, former head of the National Specialised Councils Abdel-Qader Hamed, head of the General Investment Authority Ibrahim Fawzi, Director General of the British Council Sir John Hanson and the staff of the British Council and Embassy, Blatherwick began his speech, honouring Mursi in a voice that was so true and clear that I can still recall every word:

"I am delighted to welcome you all here on this very happy occasion — especially of course Mursi and Hosny Saad El-Din.

It is particularly appropriate that Sir John Hanson, the director-general of the British Council, should be here today, because Dr Saad El-Din's connection with the British Council has been central to his extraordinary role, over more than half a century, in British-Egyptian relations: during the last years of the British occupation, through the revolution and the disaster of

that 'overbear' him tell Hosny and Hani that he believed the *Weekly* to be the best newspaper in Egypt. "His Tuesday evening television slot, broadcast in English, is an essential part of the week's viewing."

"One element of Mursi's career has not reached the official biographies. In the darkest days of late 1956, he was taken from his home in great secrecy to an unknown destination to be told that he was the new censor of English language books and newspapers. What an opportunity, as well as a duty, I understand there are still rooms full of manuscript which await exploration. And he tells me that books still arrive on his desk in a Kafka-like echo of things past."

"I have talked about Mursi. But it is quite unfair that his wife Hosny is at risk of being overlooked. As you all know, she is just as formidable and impressive as her husband,

books, plays, painting, music and ideas makes him no less Egyptian. Indeed, the two cultures are mutually enriching."

"But his talents benefit us too. Egyptians and British, we inhabit our respective cultural islands. Most of us here know something of the other's island, but I suspect that most of us would confess — as I certainly do — that we have only scratched its surface. People like Mursi Saad El-Din, voyagers of the intellect and the emotions, not only interpret us to each other, but enable us to learn from each other, to absorb the best from each other, and to respect each other through good times and bad."

"Throughout fifty years or more Dr Saad El-Din has worked to keep Egypt and Britain in touch culturally and intellectually, and to ensure the benefits of our relationship for both of us. For that we

wishes for the future."

"Well really, darlings, as the medal was handed over to my friend, tears came to my eyes, and my zircon-studded glasses misted over. Looking across the room, I noticed that retired Gen. Ahmed Fahmy currently head of the Middle East Research Centre, political writer Mohamed Sayyid Ahmed and his wife Matissa, former ambassador to Washington, Dr Ashraf Ghiorbel, former Ambassador Hosni El-Kamel, cultural affairs specialist at the United States Information Agency at the US Embassy, Dalia Talaat, and art critic Mohamed Saleh of *Al-Ahram*, were just as moved as I was. I did, however, manage to control my emotions until Mursi himself got up on the podium and said:

"The ambassador has left very little for me to say." (Darlings, looking at the expression on the faces of Mursi's son Hamdi, director of sales and marketing at the Swiss Hotel in Helipolis, and his daughter Meena, I realised that they, as well as myself, couldn't have agreed with him more). "I would like to start by saying that the guests who are here today are friends and it is in this capacity that they are with me on this important occasion."

"I am indeed honoured to receive the CBE and I would like to say that all my life I have

believed in cultural exchanges. It is the culture of nations that survives and not their politics. We talk about Chamber's England, Shakespeare's England without even knowing the names of the kings who ruled during their times."

"Egypt has always been open to other cultures, and in this field she has given as much as she has taken. This is very clear in our relations with Britain. A whole generation of Egyptians, my generation, has been influenced by British culture. And at the same time many English writers have been influenced by Egypt and her culture. Lawrence Durrell and his *Alexandria Quartet*, P.H. Newby and his *Picnic to Sakkara* and his *Egyptian Trilogy*, Robin Jeffries who wrote one of the best books on Egypt, *Egypt: The Land of the Valley* poets like Terence Tiller, Bernard Spencer, John Walker, G.S. Fraser to mention just a few. All these famous writers were greatly influenced by Egypt, their novels had an Egyptian setting and their poems were about the Nile, the pyramids, the monuments and other landmarks and people, I would like to add that being a great believer in cultural exchanges, I do not accept the idea of cultural invasion. There is a process of give and take in culture. In this respect I remember

Ghandi's famous words 'Let us build our house on strong foundations, and open all the windows.'

"Dear friends, thank you."

"You can rest assured, darlings, that when Mursi goes to England later on this year to have HM Queen Elizabeth herself officially bestow the title upon him, that I will be right there alongside him to give him a little moral support."

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"The best paper in Egypt", Blatherwick tells Hosny (centre) and Hani; Jelena El-Sadat with Mursi and Hosny

both owe him a very great deal indeed. "Dr Saad El-Din, it is in recognition of your outstanding contribution to British-Egyptian relations over so long a period that HM The Queen has appointed you to be an honorary Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. It is with great pleasure that, on Her Majesty's behalf, I present you with the badge of the order. May I congratulate you and add my own very best

دعا من اجلنا